Star Slammers™

THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

WALTER SIMONSON

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D E D I C A T I O N

This book is for the late Tom Sgouros of RISD: artist, teacher, mentor, spirit guide, and friend. He gave me the green light to undertake the original *Star Slammers* as an art-school project, and it eventually turned into something more. Without Tom's help and encouragement, it's quite possible there wouldn't have been anything more.

For the Washington Science Fiction Association (circa 1969/72), without whose support there would likely have been no *Star Slammers*.

For Ernie Mareske,
WWII veteran and friend, who is Rojas.

And for Weezie, who still manages to seem interested in every project I do.

My Curious and Fortuitous Pathway to the Stars...

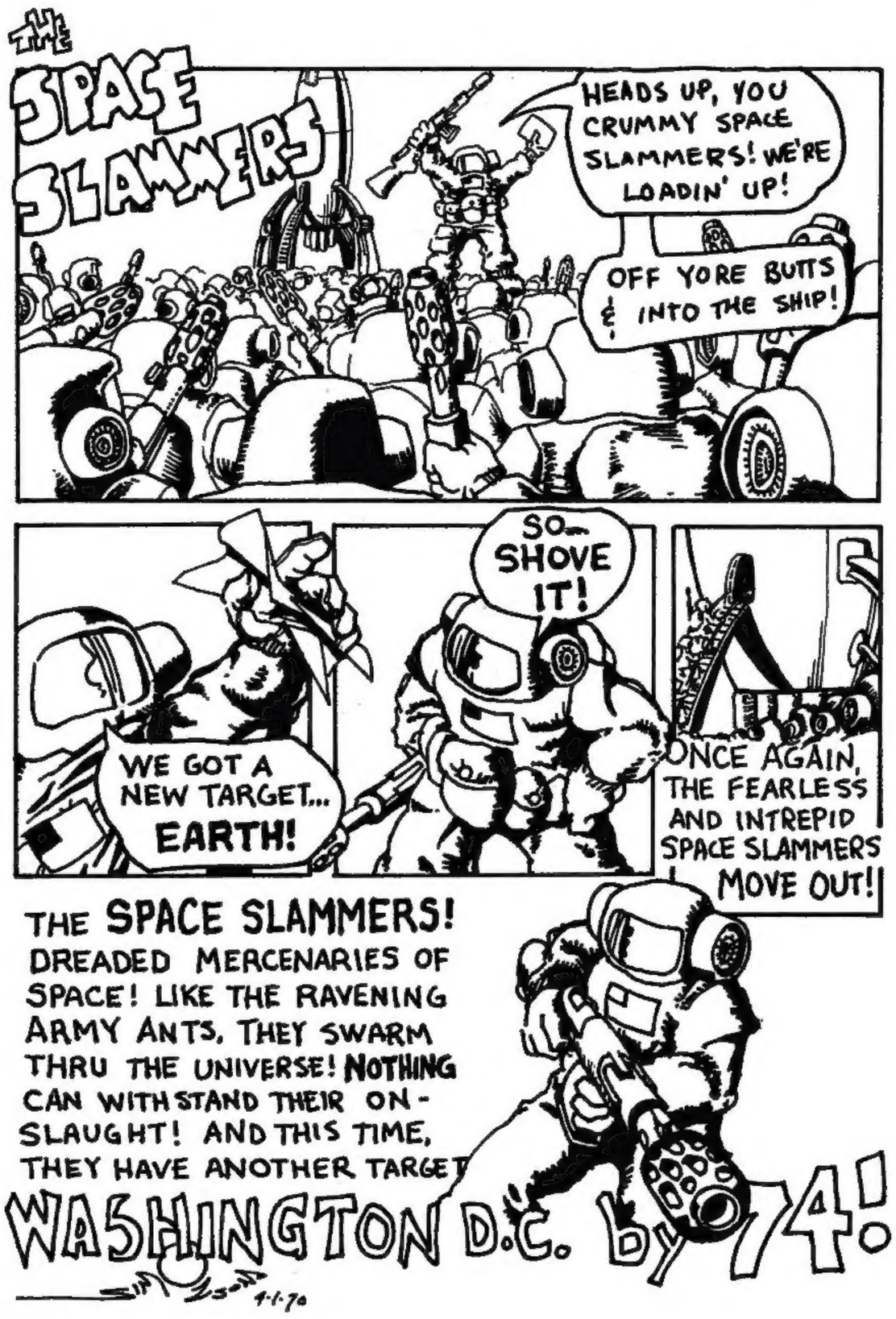
Star Slammers began life under a slightly different title as a series of one-sheets, a promotional comic with a humorous bent. It changed very quickly into a promotional comic with a straighter pulp SF sensibility in a series of multi-page chapters. At exactly the same time, *Star Slammers* morphed into both my junior-year illustration project and subsequent senior degree thesis while I was at the Rhode Island School of Design. And, eventually, it became the portfolio I brought to New York City in search of work as a professional cartoonist and storyteller in comic books.

The strip was pretty successful on all counts, except for the quickly abandoned series of one-sheets. I only did two, and on the same day. Just as well, really. I was trying to create something that partook of the work of both Robert Crumb and Vaughn Bod□. I had the sensibilities of neither. The good news is that I figured that out pretty rapidly.

However, I'm getting ahead of myself. The *Slammers* really began in 1969. I was living in College Park, Maryland, back then. I had just graduated from Amherst College, but hadn't begun to figure out my life, so I moved back home and went to work in a local university bookstore. I was a big SF/fantasy reader, and I started stocking our store with as large a selection of SF and fantasy as I could get my hands on. As a result, a number of readers interested in those genres began shopping at the store, and in short order, I found myself a member of the Washington Science Fiction Association. The club met a couple times a month in downtown Washington, D.C., at a member's apartment. It was fun and social and broadening. And by 1970, the club had become involved in bidding to host the 1974 World SF Convention. There were several other contenders, all bidding against each other for the privilege of hosting the convention in their cities. The voting to confirm the con's location was to be held at the World SF Con in 1972.

Then, as now, there were any number of regular SF conventions around the country, such as Westercon, Lunacon, and others. And members of

WSFA often traveled to these other cons. So, as the club was brainstorming promotional ideas to try to encourage favorable voting for a Washington World Con, I proposed doing a strip (my original one-sheet idea) that would feature an ongoing serial. The basic idea would revolve around a bunch of space mercenaries who had been hired by a third party to destroy Washington, D.C., in '74. I cleverly (!) dropped the century tag to tie the strip to a "DC in '74" motif to sustain the fiction that the story was occurring in some distant future. I called the original strip *The Space Slammers*, inspired in part by a paperback Western title I'd seen on a spinner rack called *Gunslammer*. I never read



the book, but I thought it was a cool name.

My idea was to produce a series of single-sheet chapters, advancing the story over the two years or so before the voting would take place. The president of the club, Jay Haldeman, had an offset press in his basement at home. The sheets would be printed up there, and then WSFA members going to other SF cons could take handfuls of the sheets and drop them on the freebie tables at the cons they attended around the country.

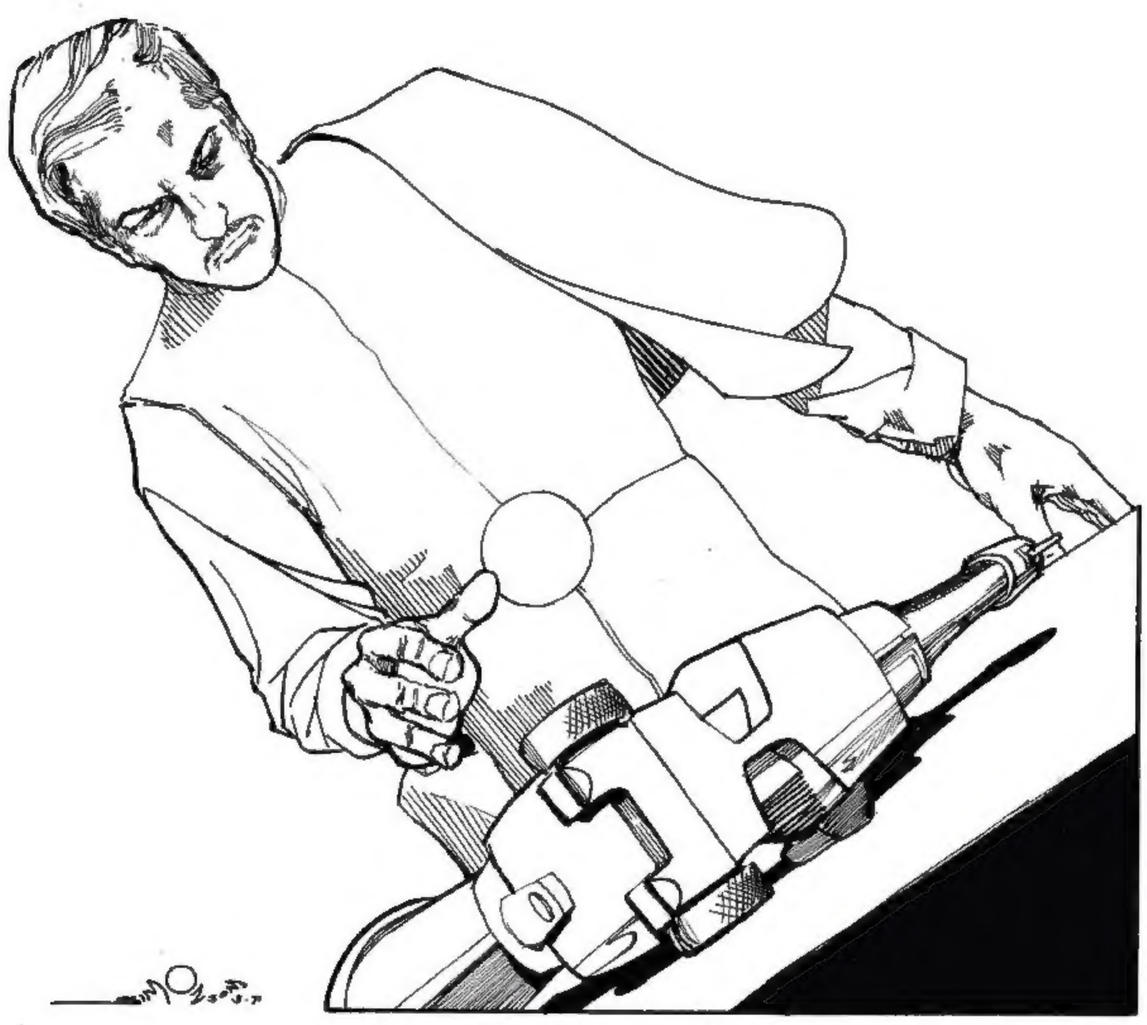
I realized very rapidly that humor was not my forte. And I was more interested in adventure comics in any case. So I tried the idea out again in a slightly more serious format. I wrote and drew a one-off five-page chapter, really as an experiment. It was the tale of an encounter by the Slammers in deep space with a rather cryptic entity who apparently inhabited the nightmares of space travelers everywhere. I've always liked cryptic stories, and the truth is that I had no more idea who the entity the Slammers encountered was than they did. So far, I haven't had the chance to go back and find out, but that day may come.

In the meantime, I had reentered college, transferring into the Rhode Island School of Design as an Illustration Major. Under the tutelage of Thomas Sgouros, head of the Illustration Department and junior-year Illustration professor, students were required, among other things, to complete a single project that ran across the entire junior year. As I was just starting to work on the rechristened *Star Slammers* for the WSFA campaign, I proposed using the strip to fulfill Tom's yearlong assignment. As far as I know, nobody at RISD had done a comic strip/book before as an assignment, but I was quite serious about it, and Tom, to my everlasting gratitude, approved my proposal. So the *Slammers* became an academic exercise as well as a promotional one. And much of what I learned at RISD went into the strip.

RISD put a lot of emphasis on lettering when I was a student there. It wasn't so much that the school was working to improve student lettering skills, as it was an effort to foster an appreciation for both the craft of lettering and the art of the letterforms themselves. We studied Arrighi's 16th-century Chancery script handbook, Operina, and learned lettering in the italic Chancery hand ourselves, using Osmiroid chisel-point fountain lettering pens. I didn't elect to letter the *Slammers* in Chancery, but I did use my Osmiroid fountain

pen. And having had a short course in typography, I began employing my broadened eye in my display lettering—the titles and sound effects—to make bolder choices. That particular RISD influence remains a powerful element in my work to this day, first evidenced in the *Slammers*.

Chapter III represents the beginning of my understanding of the value of reference. I was using very little reference up to this point in my drawing, with the exception of life-drawing classes and local sketches I was making here and there. For many students (or at least for me), the idea that something you're learning in class has any application in the real world is a big jump. In this issue, I used one of my roommates at RISD as the model for the



Lieutenant who failed in his duty.
I still recognize Larry from my drawings although I wouldn't say they were a perfect likeness. But it did give the unfortunate Lieutenant a face distinct from the other characters in the strip, and was really the start of my deeper appreciation that reference could make my drawings better. Chapter IV, page 5, where the gloved hand strikes the "Explosive Ejection" button is the drawing I generally think of as the moment in time when I reached "enlightenment," and began to understand the value of life drawing. That is my gloved hand drawn while looking in a mirror.
When I became a senior, I was able to convince my Senior Illustration advisor, Edgar Blakeney, to let me continue with the strip as my senior thesis, another first at RISD. My drawing improved markedly over the two years I worked on the *Slammers*. I like to think that the drawing in the opening chapters of the strip was pretty good fan material, and the drawing by the end was just about professional grade. The timing coincided perfectly so I finished the eighth and final chapter of the story shortly before my thesis was due, and also just in time to allow that last chapter to be printed in Jay's basement and sent out across the U.S. of A. to SF cons everywhere a couple of months before the actual voting for the 1974 | World Con host city.

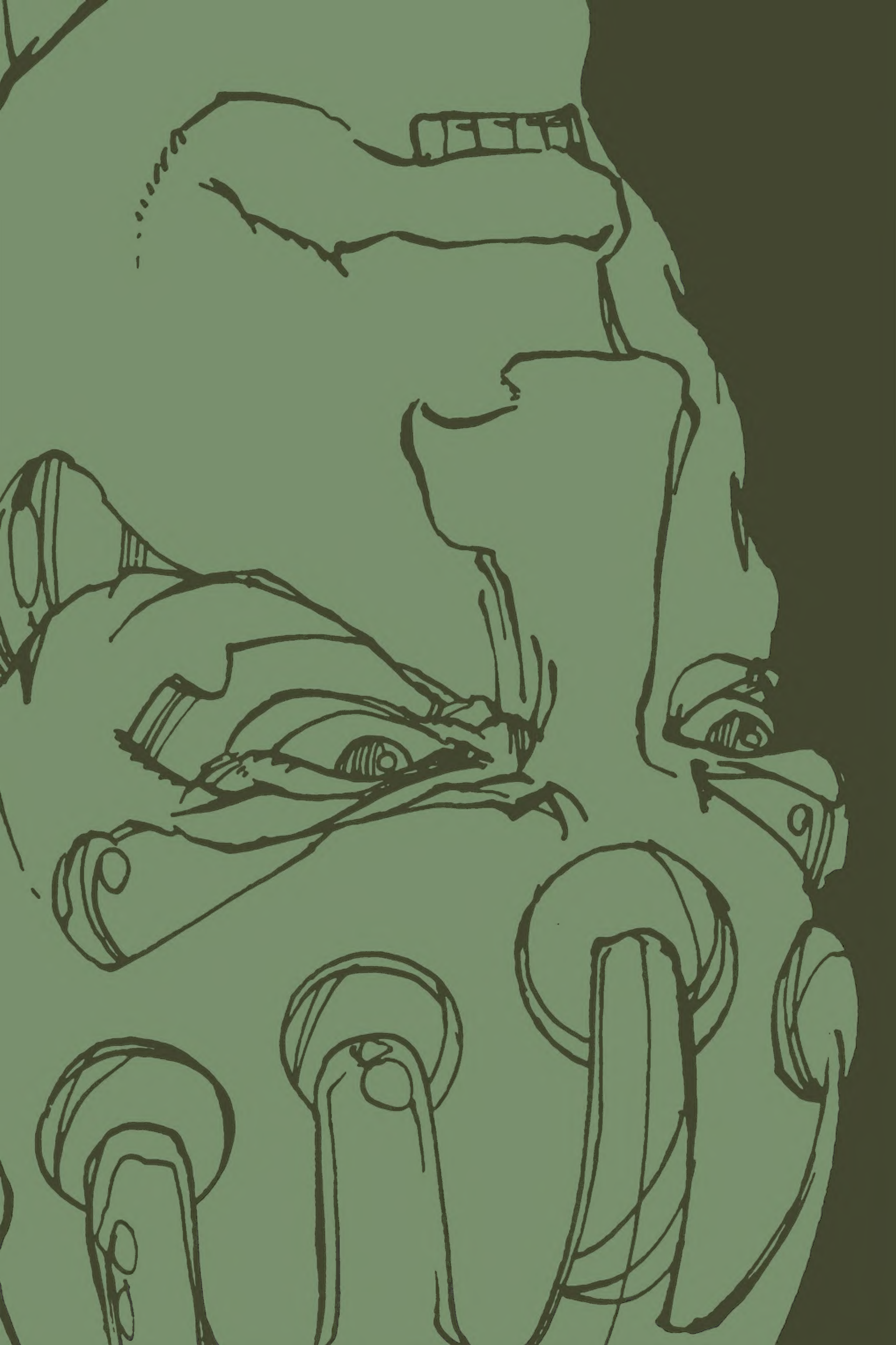
None of this experience was quite as organized or foresighted as it sounds here in short form, but essentially, this was the birth of the Slammers, first as an idea, and then as an actual comic. And when I came to New York City in 1972, and went to the DC Comics offices with my shabby taped-together cardboard portfolio containing the last few chapters of the Star Slammers, I wasn't tossed out of the office, but was instead handed a script to draw, a Len Wein story! It was the very beginning of what would turn out to be a career.

Not bad for a guy who wrote and drew a strip originally conceived as a badly executed Robert Crumb/Vaughn Bod fusion.

Walter Simonson
December 10, 2014

PS: WSFA did, in fact, win the World Con bid. The club hosted Discon II at the Sheraton Park Hotel in Washington, D.C., at the end of August, 1974. No doubt the Slammers had a lot to do with that.

;-)



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by Walter Simonson
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MOSTLY, I REMEMBER THE BUGS. THEY WERE ALWAYS BAD AROUND THE CITADEL, BUT SPRAYIN' KEPT 'EM DOWN. 'COURSE, WHEN YOU'RE SURROUNDED, THE FLITTERS JUST KEEP BREEDIN' IN THE SWAMPS AND THE CORPSES AND THERE'S NOTHIN' YOU CAN DO.

THE SKRIKS ARE NO PUSH-OVERS. EVEN IF THEY ONLY HAVE ONE GUY TO A CAMP-FIRE. WE'RE STILL IN BIG TROUBLE.

I HADDA ADMIT, SLINGER WAS RIGHT. WE WERE IN BIG TROUBLE.

I FELL ASLEEP THINKIN' ABOUT WELSHIN' ON MY BETS.

THE DAWN CAME UP LIKE THUNDER!

KLOW!

WHOOM!

BE-YOW

PAKKA PAKKAPAKKA

WHUMP WHUMP

WHOUM TAKKA TAKKA

BAM

BANG

...AND WHEN IT GOT LIGHT ENOUGH...

...I COULD SEE WE WERE GONNA HAVE A LOT MORE FLITTERS IN A FEW DAYS.

I ALSO SAW THAT I WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE SLAMMERS.

THERE WERE LESS THAN FIFTY OF 'EM.

A LOT LESS.

I GUESS THEY DIDN'T NEED ANY MORE.

KLANG KLANG

OPEN UP!

GRO ONN GG!!!!

WELCOME. THE PRINCES OF THE CITADEL GREET HER MIGHTY RESCUERS... THE STAR SLAMMERS. THE CITY IS Y....

WE'LL SKIP THE FORMAL-ITIES.

THE SKRIKS ARE GONE, NOT FORGOT-TEN. THEY'LL BE BACK, BUT WE NEED A BREAK OUR-SELVES.

EVERYTHING THE CITADEL HAS TO OFFER IS YOURS. SOME FOOD? DRINK? WOMEN? MEN? WE HAVE THE FINEST DIVERSIONS...

THERE ISN'T TIME. NO WONDER YOU PEOPLE DON'T WIN ANY FIGHTS.

SEE TO IT THAT THE SPOILS OF BATTLE ARE GATHERED AC-CORDING TO OUR AGREEMENT. AND SHOW US TO OUR QUARTERS. WE WILL REST NOW.

AS YOU DESIRE.

KAMUI

PLEASE. DO NOTHING RASH.

SLAMMERS ARE NEVER RASH--UNLIKE OUR MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

YOU'RE ONE OF THE OFFICIALS WE SAW THIS AFTERNOON.

IS THIS AN OFFICIAL VISIT?

PERHAPS.

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED TO LEARN THAT THE CITY FATHERS PLAN TO BETRAY YOU?

INDEED?

THEY WILL SLAY YOU AS SOON AS YOU HAVE WON THE WAR FOR THEM.

I TAKE IT YOU'RE HERE TO SUGGEST AN ALTERNATIVE?

THE SKRIKS ARE HEAVILY ARMED. YOU CAUGHT THEM BY SURPRISE BUT WHEN THEY RETURN, THEY WILL SURELY WIN.

YET THEY WILL BE GENEROUS IN VICTORY IF YOU AID THEM.

MANY LIVES COULD BE SPARED.

AND PROLONGING THE BATTLE IS SO FUTILE.

"TONIGHT, THE SKRIKS WILL BE REGROUPING AT THEIR MOTHER-SHIP BEYOND THE IMPASSABLE SWAMPS, READYING THEM-SELVES FOR THE FINAL ASSAULT.

"YOU COULD BE THEIR KEY TO VICTORY."

THE NIGHT WEARS ON WITHOUT WORD.

DO YOU THINK THE SLAMMERS WILL CHANGE SIDES?

IF WE'RE GOING TO TAKE THE CITADEL, THEY'LL HAVE TO. WE LOST NEARLY A THIRD OF OUR FORCES LAST NIGHT, AND THE SURVIVORS ARE SCARED.

MOST OF THEM ARE BELOW, TANKING UP ON HOK-DREAMS...OR WORSE.

LET'S HOPE LACK-LAND CAN PERSUADE THE SLAMMERS TO OUR POINT OF VIEW.

SUPPOSE SHE DOES.

WILL WE HAVE TO KILL THEM AFTER WE WIN, TO KEEP THE CITADEL'S TREASURE?

YOU MIGHT.

BUT YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO.

HUH?

CAPTAIN! A SHIP'S APPROACHING THE CITADEL FROM THE SWAMPS.

SHE'S TAKING NO EVASIVE ACTION!

SHE'S... SIR! SHE'S LANDING!

IT'S THE SKRIKS' MOTHER-SHIP!

VAROOSH!

ATTENTION, THE SHIP. YOU ARE **SURROUNDED.** ANY HOSTILE ACT WILL BE MET WITH APPROPRIATE...

LET'S NOT GET CRAZY, EVERYBODY. THE WAR'S OVER. WE'VE CAPTURED THE BAD GUYS!

HUSTLE OVER TO THE LANDING BAY AND PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE PRISONERS.

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S OVER! HOW DID YOU CROSS THE SWAMPS WITHOUT BEING DETECTED?

CAREFULLY.

NOBODY WAS LOOKING FOR US, AND MOST OF THE SKRIKS WERE PRETTY STONED.

EVEN THE PERIMETER GUARDS.

WE JUST LOCKED THEM UP IN THEIR OWN SHIP!

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE YOU SHOULD KNOW.

?

IT'S ABOUT ONE OF YOUR CITY OFFICIALS.

HEY, LEGGO. SHE'S GETTING AWAY.

I DON'T THINK SHE'LL GO TOO FAR.

YEAH, BUT...

SSHHH, HERE SHE COMES NOW.

ROARRR!

PAKKA PAKKA PAKKA PAKKA!

LOOK OUT!

IT'S COUNCILOR LACKLAND!

SHE'S TRYING TO FREE THE PRISONERS!

THTHTHTHT

RITHTHTHTHTHTHT

BRILLIANT SHOT! WHY, WE'LL EVEN BE ABLE TO SALVAGE THE FIGHTER.

AUTO GUIDANCE WILL LAND IT SAFELY. IT'S OUR BEST MODEL.

GOOD! HAVE IT LOADED ABOARD THE SKRIK MOTHERSHIP WITH THE REST OF THE WEAPONS.

WHAT?

OUR CONTRACT AWARDS US THE SPOILS OF WAR, REMEMBER?

WEAPONS OF THE ENEMY.

SHE WAS AN ENEMY, WASN'T SHE?

BUT... BUT...

EXACTLY. I KNEW YOU'D BE REASON-ABLE.

AND SO...

BROTHER, YOU GUYS ARE TAKING ALONG ENOUGH HARDWARE TO START YOUR OWN WAR.

THAT'S RIGHT.

OH... UH...

HEH... UH...GOOD LUCK.

THANKS.

DON'T HURRY BACK.

YOU KNOW, SPHERE, YOU SHOULDN'T REALLY SCARE THEM LIKE THAT.

...WHY NOT? THEY'D NEVER HAVE GIVEN US THAT FIGHTER AS A GIFT, AND WE'LL NEED EVERY WEAPON WE CAN SCROUNGE IF WE'RE GOING TO STOP THE ORIONS.

BESIDES, IT'S GOOD FOR OUR TOUGH-GUY IMAGE. SLAMMERS MUST ADVERTISE, YOU KNOW.

I'VE BEEN HEARING ABOUT THE ORION INVASION EVER SINCE MY PARENTS DIED.

WE'RE STILL COLLECTING WEAPONS AND STILL WAITING FOR THE ORIONS.

DON'T WORRY. THEY'LL COME. ANYTIME NOW. SO SAYS THE GRANDFATHER, AND HE'S AN ORION HIMSELF.

GET SET FOR LIGHT-JUMP.

I'M STARTING TO FEAR THAT I'M SQUANDERING MY YOUTH.

COUNT TWO. ONE. REALITY INVERSION COMPLETE!

JUMP!

MIGHT AS WELL RELAX. WE WON'T BE DROPPING OUT OF JUMPSPACE FOR A WHILE.

LET'S CHECK OUT THE LARDER.

MAYBE WE CAN FIND SOMETHING THERE TO CONVINCE LITTLE ETHON THAT HE ISN'T WASTING HIS TIME.

THAT WON'T BE DIFFICULT. BUT I DO WONDER IF THE GRANDFATHER ISN'T WASTING HIS. SPHERE?

IS THE SILVER-MIND REAL?

I CAN'T SAY.

BUT TO TRY TO FORGE A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE MINDS OF ALL THE SLAMMERS.

TO LASH THEIR PERCEPTIONS TOGETHER AND MAKE SENSE OUT OF EVERY-THING.

I CAN BARELY HOLD A SINGLE MINDBRIDGE WITH JALAIA NOW.

THAT'S ONE REASON WHY WE TAKE YOU CALLOW YOUTHS ALONG, ETHON. TO TEACH YOU BRIDGING'S DELICATE ART. YOU'LL SOON BE BRIDGING AS EASILY WITH SPHERE AS YOU DO WITH ME.

ALAS, JALAIA, DON'T YOU LOVE ME FOR MY BODY?

HA! WITH TALENT LIKE YOURS?

NOBODY ELSE HAS SPENT SO MUCH TIME BRIDGING WITH THE GRANDFATHER.

DRUGS, PSIONICS, DEEP-BREATHING. WE'VE TRIED THEM ALL, AND YOU...YOU'RE GOING TO BE THE DEEPEST MIND-BRIDGER OF ANY OF US.

IF **YOU** CAN KICK AWAY THE COBWEBS, WE MAY YET ACHIEVE THE SILVERMIND AND BEAT THE ORIONS!

I'M NOT SURE I LIKE IT.

AND I **STILL** DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.

IT SCARES ME--THE LIGHTS, THE NEEDLES, THE GRANDFATHER HIMSELF!

HE'S AN ORION, A HUNTER. HE'S OLD, BUT STILL HE HUNTS.

AND MAYBE THE SILVERMIND IS THE GREATEST GAME OF ALL.

GREATER GAME EVEN THAN THE SLAMMERS ON HOMEWORLD, THOUGH THAT'S WHERE THIS HUNT BEGAN. I LEARNED THAT MUCH THE LAST TIME WE BRIDGED.

WE'RE PART OF THE SAME STORY, THE GRANDFATHER AND I.

THE YEARS FELL AWAY.

WE BECAME CHILDREN TOGETHER AND WERE HUNTED. WE SHARED MINDS AND HUNTED TOGETHER.

AND I SAW AGAIN THE FIELDS OF MY CHILDHOOD...

...AND MY PARENTS.

ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES AND WE'LL REACH COVER.

I LIKE THE SKY, DAD. IT'S BLUE.

IT IS DANGER, LITTLE ETHON. ALWAYS REMEMBER-- THE SKY IS DEATH.

TOPOLIS, LISTEN. CAN YOU--?

"I HEAR IT, CARISSA. THE HUNTERS HAVE FOUND US."

SSSSSSSSHH

THE SKY IS AGAINST US, ETHON.

HIDE YOURSELF AND YOUR SISTER. YOUR MOTHER AND I WILL LURE IT AWAY.

DAD?

GOT A TARGET, SENATOR. THE QUAKE DID BRING 'EM OUT.

THERE.

HOLD HER STEADY, THURSDAY, WHILE I LOAD.

MARVELOUS, ISN'T IT, FOLKS, HOW THE GUIDES CAN FLUSH OUT THE GAME SO EASILY.

LITTLE DID OUR ANCESTORS KNOW THEY WERE CREATING THE GREATEST SPORT OF ALL BACK WHEN THEY USED TO DUMP UNDESIRABLES ON THIS FORSAKEN WORLD.

DON'T WORRY, LADIES. I'VE GOT THEM.

KRAK KRAK

OOH, CAN I HAVE THE TEETH?

CARISSA!

oh!

Plok

ZITH.

ZITH.

CARISSA...

SO. TONIGHT WE WILL SLEEP TOGETHER BENEATH THE SKY, DARLING...

...BUT WE WILL NOT SLEEP ALONE!

THERE THEY ARE.

LOOKS LIKE YOU GOT ONE OF THE SAVAGES, SENATOKKK...!

PULL UP! PULL UP! HE'S--!

PALANNNG!

UH-OH.

OH GOD, MY LEGS! THEY HURT! THEY HURT!

HURRY! GET THIS OFF ME BEFORE...

VWHAMM!

GET ME LOOSE! GET ME LOOSE!

THAKTT!

NOT TO WORRY, SENATOR. I'VE GOT HIM NOW!

PAUM

SNAPT!

DAMN!

CLICK!

THAM THAM THAM THAM THAM THAM

EVERYBODY ELSE IS DEAD, SENATOR. WE'VE GOT TO LEAVE. THERE MIGHT BE MORE OF THEM AROUND!

I'LL BE BACK TO KILL EVERY ONE OF THOSE SAVAGES!

I SWEAR IT!

NOW GET ME OUT OF HERE.

MOM? DAD?

I'M HERE, DAD.

I'M HERE.

...AND ON ORION...

WE WERE ON ORION, TOO.

WE SAW THE HALLS OF GOVERNMENT WHERE THE GRANDFATHER LISTENED AS A DECISION WAS REACHED SO LONG AGO.

WILL THE DELEGATES PLEASE BE SEATED.

THIS EMERGENCY SESSION OF THE SENATE IS ABOUT TO CONVENE.

I'D BETTER GET TO MY SEAT. EXCUSE ME, MANDERIN.

CERTAINLY, GALARIUS.

PITY GALARIUS'LL NEVER RISE TO THE TOP, BUT YOU CAN'T CHOOSE YOUR ANCESTORS TOO CAREFULLY.

I UNDERSTAND HE'S ACTUALLY PROUD OF THE CONNECTION. YET THE EMPEROR FAVORS HIM.

EVEN KRELLIK LIKES HIM.

YOUR EXCELLENCIES, RUMORS ARE RAMPANT CONCERNING THE RECENT HUNTING PARTY CATASTROPHE. SAVAGES ARMED AND DANGEROUS, MEN AND WOMEN BRUTALLY SLAIN.

WE ARE HERE TO LEARN THE TRUTH OF THIS AFFAIR AND TO ARRANGE MATTERS TO PREVENT ITS FUTURE RECURRENCE.

LOOK! HE'S LAMED! THE STORIES ARE TRUE!

EXCELLENCIES, THE MAN WHO LIVED IT ALL, AND CAN TELL US WHAT TO DO, THE RIGHT HONORABLE SENATOR KRELLIK.

YES, BOYS, THE STORIES ARE TRUE. I SIT BEFORE YOU NOW, KEPT ALIVE AND SANE ONLY BY THE MIRACLE OF SCIENCE!

I WENT TO HUNT FOR SPORT, AS WOULD ANY MAN HERE.

I CAME BACK, CRIPPLED IN BODY, BUT REBORN IN SPIRIT.

I SAW THE FINEST HUNTERS, SLAIN BY A SINGLE MAN, THE LIKES OF WHOM WE'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE.

WE'VE NEW NEIGHBORS, BOYS. DANGEROUS ONES. WHOEVER HEARD OF SAVAGES RISING TO SLAY THE HUNTERS OF ORION?

THERE'S A NEW BREED OF EXILE, TREACHEROUSLY HIDDEN UNTIL NOW FROM OUR SPIES AND SATELLITES.

A DECEITFUL RACE READY TO SLAY US IF WE GIVE THEM THE CHANCE.

BUT WE MUST STRIKE FIRST.

I CAN NO LONGER RISE FROM MY CHAIR OF PAIN.

THAT STRENGTH MUST BE YOURS.

YOU CAN GIVE ME THE WEAPONS TO SAVE OUR PEOPLE.

THE HUNT IS ON, BOYS.

JOIN ME!

CAST YOUR VOTES. LIFE OR DEATH.

THE ROSE... OR THE SKULL.

"AND WE SEE THE TOTEM THAT WILL DECIDE OUR FATE."

WELL SPOKEN, BOYS. WE WILL RE-MAKE THE EXILES PLANET IN A NEWER, MORE CONGENIAL IMAGE.

WHY IS IT, GALARIAN, I CAN NEVER PER-SUADE YOU TO DO THE RIGHT THING?

SANCTION-ING GENO-CIDE, YOU MEAN?

THINK OF IT RATHER AS SUPPORTING A WAY OF LIFE.

THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTED HEAVILY IN THE HUNTS. THERE ISN'T MUCH BREAD; WE'VE GOT TO PROVIDE THE CIRCUSES.

AND WE CAN'T AFFORD TO HAVE A RACE OF SAVAGES MAKING FOOLS OF US ON NATIONAL TV.

WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF THIS FIASCO HAD BEEN AIRED.

AS IT IS, WE HAD A LOT OF DIFFICULTY DESTROY-ING THOSE FILMS.

THE NETWORK WAS SCREAMING.

BUT IT MAY TURN OUT FOR THE BEST.

NOW WE'LL HAVE A HUNT TO FOCUS ON FOR YEARS TO COME.

ARE THEY REALLY SO DANGEROUS?

WORSE THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE. WE WERE FIGHT-ING A SINGLE ADULT MALE...

...ARMED WITH A LOUSY SLING!

THAT'S WHY WE ATE THE FILMS.

IMAGINE SEEING THE MIGHTY HUNT-ERS LAID LOW BY A SLING!

UNTHINKABLE!

BEST TO MAKE A FRESH START!

WE CAN ALWAYS RESEED THE PLANET LATER.

Thipp

A SLING?

A SLING?

BY MY ANCESTORS, A SLING!

OHHH... MY HEAD.

RELAX, LITTLE ETHON. YOU'LL RECOVER SHORTLY.

IS IT TRUE, GRANDFATHER? MY PARENTS' DEATHS WILL BRING MORE HUNTERS THAN WE'VE EVER SEEN?

IT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED SOMETIME.

TALENT LIKE YOUR FATHER'S WOULD NOT HAVE STAYED HIDDEN FOREVER.

AND HE WAS ONLY ONE OF MANY.

BUT WHY SEEK OUT THE SILVERMIND? IF WE'RE SUCH GOOD FIGHTERS, WHY NOT JUST FIGHT?

BECAUSE THE HUNTERS WOULD DEVOUR YOU AS AN ARMY OF ANTS DEVOURS THE HART.

YOU HAVE THE TRUE STRENGTH OF WARRIORS.

IT IS NOT ENOUGH.

YOU HAVE MINDBRIDGING TO SHARE EACH OTHER.

IT MAKES YOU WHOLE; IT DOES NOT MAKE YOU GREAT.

IT WON'T SAVE YOU FROM THE NUMBERLESS ARMADA THAT WILL COME TO "CLEANSE" AND RESEED YOUR WORLD.

SO WE SEEK THE MIND OF A MILLION. SILVER THREADS OF THOUGHT THAT WILL WEAVE THE SLAMMERS TOGETHER INTO ONE COMBUSTIBLE ENTITY.

"THE SILVERMIND," HE SAID, "WOULD BE A WEAPON BEYOND PRICE."

ARE ALL THE HUNTERS OF ORION SO CRAZY?

ONLY THE GRAND-FATHER AND HIS GRAND-CHILDREN, LITTLE ETHON.

BUT DON'T WORRY.

I'LL SHOW YOU JUST HOW CRAZY I AM ABOUT **YOU** WHEN WE GET HOME.

IF YOU FOLKS ARE QUITE FINISHED, WE'VE REACHED A JUMP POINT.

WE'RE ABOUT TO SNAP BACK INTO REALITY.

YOUR TROUBLE, SPHERE...

...IS THAT YOU LACK A ROMANTIC IMAGINATION. YOU OUGHT TO...

...SEE THAT MY INSUR-ANCE IS PAID UP. THESE ARE SHIPS FROM **ORION**.

I'D SAY WE'VE BEEN HAD!

SHORTLY, IN AN ORION BRIG...

I GUESS OUR RECENT EMPLOYERS WERE UN-HAPPIER THAN I THOUGHT ABOUT LOSING THAT FIGHTER.

YOU THINK SO?

SEEMS LIKELY. PROBABLY BROADCAST AN ALL-BAND GRUMP ABOUT IT AND THE ORIONS PICKED IT UP.

IT WOULDN'T BE HARD TO FIGURE OUT WHAT JUMP POINTS WE'D BE PASSING THROUGH RETURNING TO HOME-WORLD.

I SHOULD HAVE FORE-SEEN THAT. NOW WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR THEM TO MAKE A MISTAKE.

DON'T BLAME YOURSELF, SPHERE. NONE OF US...

STHRAPPPT!

SYNAPSE DISRUPTOR!

I CAN HARDLY BREATHE.

OK, BOYS, THEY'RE OUT OF IT.

GRAB THE YOUNGEST.

THEY WANT TO START WITH HIM.

MEDULLA OBLONGATA ON THE NET, YOUR EXEC-UTIVENESS.

NEURAL PROBES EN-GAGED AND CHARGED, YOUR EXECUTIVE-NESS.

EXCELLENT.

BEGIN WITH STAGE TWO HE'LL TELL US WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW...

...EVENTUALLY.

7

IT'S BEEN OVER TWO HOURS.

I'M WORRIED, SPHERE. THE ORIONS HAVE NEVER CAUGHT A LIVE SLAMMER BEFORE.

I THINK THEY'RE...

...THEY'RE...

JALAIA?

ETHON! ETHON!

KRAK KRAK

I'M HERE, DAD.

THAM THAM THAM

JALAIA! I CAN HEAR YOU!

GIVE HIM ANOTHER JOLT.

STAGE SEVEN.

OH, SPHERE! THEY'RE TORTURING HIM!

I CAN SEE IT!

I CAN HEAR IT!

BOY, HE SURE CAN TAKE IT!

JALAIA! I HEAR IT! I CAN HEAR IT, **TOO!**

AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE GUARDING THE BRIG?

YEAH, BUT WITH ONLY TWO OTHER PRISONERS, WE THOUGHT WE'D WATCH.

NEVER SAW A REAL SLAMMER BEFORE.

YOU'VE ALREADY SEEN ONE TOO MANY. COME ON, JALAIA. THERE AREN'T ANY GUARDS OUTSIDE.

SHIFT TO EXTREME COMBAT REGIME. WE'RE LEAVING!

WE AWAIT YOUR ANSWER, YOUNG WARRIOR.

EVERYBODY WANTS TO KNOW ABOUT US. ALL RIGHT, I'LL TELL YOU. WE HAVE BEEN AROUND A LONG TIME, UNKNOWN TO YOU MIGHTY HUNTERS. WOULD'VE STAYED THAT WAY TOO IF YOU HADN'T CAUGHT MY FAMILY IN THE OPEN.

WE **ARE** DESCENDANTS OF THE EXILES! AND WE **ARE** THE **STAR SLAMMERS!**

BUT WE'VE HUNTED YOUR RACE FOR YEARS. THERE WAS NO FIGHT IN THEM.

WHEN IT WAS NECESSARY, THE OLD AND INFIRM USED TO GO OUT TO DIE AT YOUR HANDS. IT GAVE YOU SOMETHING TO DO AND KEPT THE REST OF US HIDDEN.

NOW, WE CAN'T HIDE ANY LONGER. NOW, WE'LL FIGHT LIKE HELL.

HMMMM. WHY THIS SUDDEN ELEQUENCE?

BECAUSE IT WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE. LOOK BEHIND YOU.

WHAKK!

HOW IS HE?

HE'S DYING, SPHERE.

I'VE SHUT OFF THE POWER.

I SEE.

STAGE 10

RATHTHT

AAAAAAGGGG!

JALAIA? SPHERE? GRAND-FATHER WAS RIGHT. I COULD DO IT.

I COULD MINDBRIDGE YOU WHILE YOU WERE IN YOUR CELL.

I COULD BRIDGE... EVERYBODY!

DAD? I'M HERE, DAD.

I'M...

IT'S TIME TO LEAVE, JALAIA. OUR SHIP'S MOORED JUST OUTSIDE.

WE'VE GOT TO REACH HOMEWORLD AND WARN THEM THAT THE HUNTERS ARE COMING AT LAST.

AND ETHON, SPHERE?

NO WARRIOR SHOULD RIDE THE FIRESTORM HOME ALONE.

I'VE SET THE CON-TROLS.

ETHON'S GOING TO BUY US THE TIME WE NEED TO ESCAPE.

SLEEP WELL, WARRIOR. WE'LL NOT FORGET YOU.

LET'S GO, JALAIA.

DON'T LOOK BACK.

FSSSSSIP!

LOOKS LIKE I PICKED THE RIGHT TIME TO HIT THE JOHN.

UH-OH. THEY'VE BLOCKED THE PORTAL BEHIND THEM...

...AND THE SHIP'S STARTING TO MOVE.

I DON'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS.

COMMANDER, WE'RE PICKING UP AN EMERGENCY DISTRESS CALL FROM THE BRIGANTINE, RAMILLIES.

SHE'S EJECTED A LIFEBOAT.

STRANGE. I DON'T SEE ANY SIGN OF TROUBLE. SEE IF...

SHE'S ACCELERATING, HEADING THIS WAY.

SHE'S COMING RIGHT FOR US! EVASIVE MANEUVERS!

RIG FOR COLLISION!

LOCATE THAT LIFEBOAT. I WANT ANY SURVIVORS BROUGHT TO ME IMMEDIATELY.

SOON...

YOU WERE RIGHT, ADMIRAL. THOSE SO-CALLED STAR SLAMMERS ARE FROM THE EXILE'S WORLD.

THEIR SHIP WAS FULL OF ARMS. LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE EXPECTING US.

AND I SEE THEIR VESSEL HAS VANISHED IN THE CONFUSION.

GOOD. THIS WILL BE A HUNT TO REMEMBER.

THE NETWORK WILL LOVE IT!

ALERT THE FLEET. THIS IS ADMIRAL KRELLIK!

WE'RE GOING IN!

"IT WORKED. AND I WISH IT HADN'T."

"ETHON BLEW OPEN THE SILVERMIND LINK ALL THE WAY TO HOMEWORLD AND WARNED THEM AS HE DIED."

I WONDER THAT I CAN BEAR THE COST.

YOU MUST, JALAIA, IF HIS SACRIFICE IS TO MEAN ANYTHING. THE OTHER SLAMMERS HAVE NO DOUBTS.

EVERY SHIP WE'VE BEEN SCROUNGING FOR YEARS IS ARMED AND READY.

ALL BUT ONE.

OH?

I'M GOING TO SEE THAT THE CITADEL'S FIGHTER IS PREPPED.

I WANT TO BE IN IT WHEN THE HUNTERS ARRIVE.

ETHON WOULD HAVE LIKED THAT.

DO ME A FAVOR AND CHECK OUT MY SHIP, TOO, WOULD YOU, JALAIA?

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

"I'VE GOT A HOUSE CALL TO MAKE."

GRANDFATHER?

COME IN, SPHERE.

THE SKY IS FALLING AT LAST, EH?

IT'S TRUE, GRAND-FATHER. JALAIA AND I HAVE SEEN IT.

I WOULD NEVER HAVE BELIEVED THERE WERE SO MANY HUNTERS. AN ARMY OF ANTS, YOU ONCE SAID.

ETHON'S DEATH WAS JUST THE BE-GINNING, SPHERE. IT'S GOING TO GET A LOT WORSE.

HOW'S JALAIA TAKING IT?

AS LONG AS WE FIGHT, SHE'LL BE OKAY.

BUT I'M WORRIED.

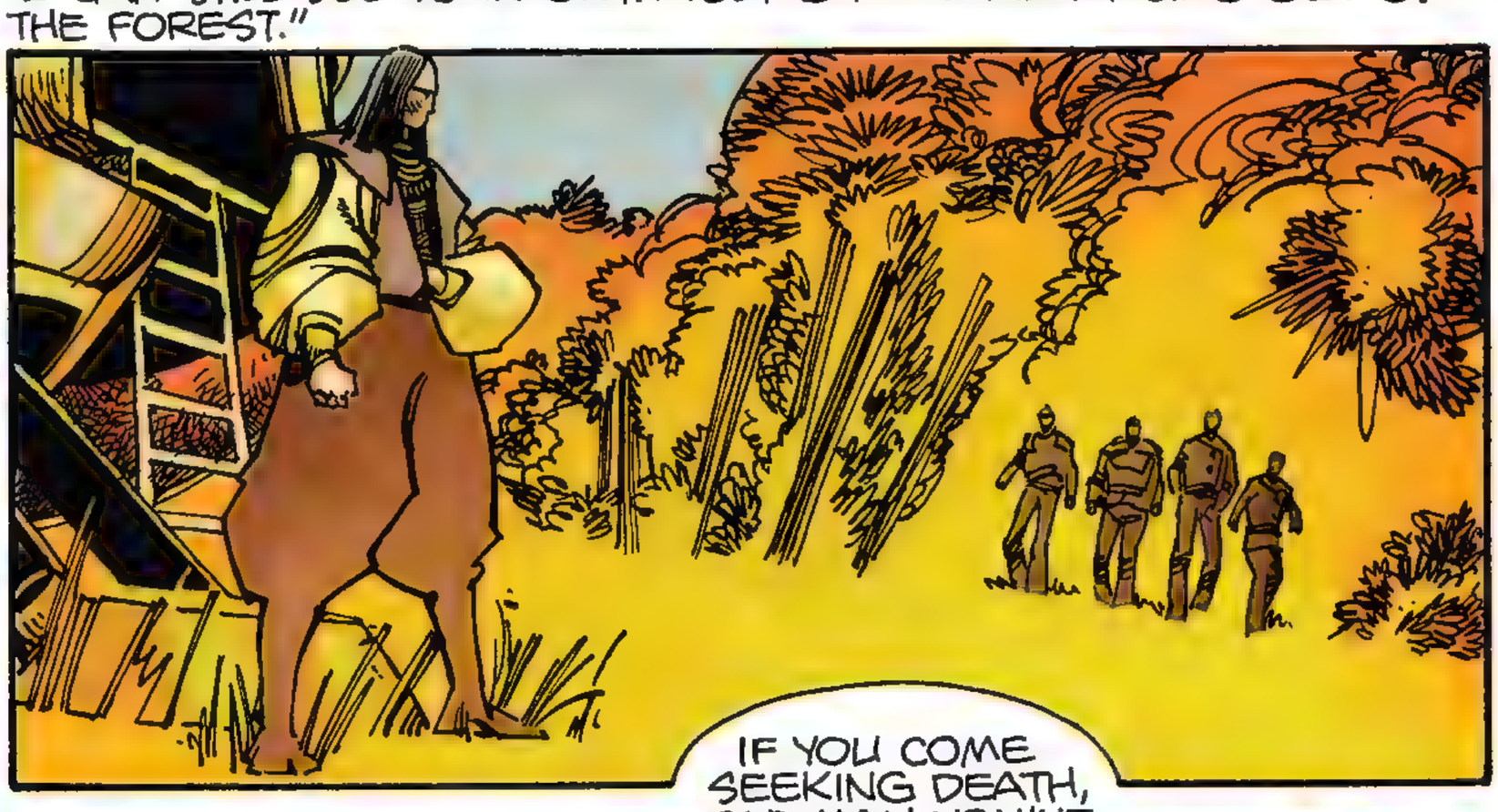
AND FRIGHTENED, I EXPECT. AS I WAS WHEN I FIRST LANDED HERE.

I REMEMBER IT WELL.

MY FEAR. MY ANTICIPA-TION.

ONLY GOVERNMENT-SANC-TIONED HUNTING PARTIES WERE ALLOWED TO VISIT THIS HIDDEN WORLD. I HAD UNLOCKED ITS SECRET LOCATION, SLIPPED PAST THE SATELLITES, AND LAND-ED NEAR A PARTY OF "SAVAGES."

"I CAN STILL SEE YOUR GRIM YOUNG FACE ADVANCING OUT OF THE FOREST."



THE TEST OF TRUE MEN WILL SETTLE THAT QUESTION.

WE'LL BURY YOU NEXT TO YOUR SHIP, OLD MAN.

BAASSH!

I PASS THE TEST, I BELIEVE.

NOW LET'S GET DOWN TO BUSINESS.

I'VE COME WITH A WARNING FOR ALL OF YOU.

THE SKY IS FALLING!

...SO YOU SEE, IT WILL TAKE THEM YEARS TO BUILD AND OUTFIT AN ARMADA LARGE ENOUGH FOR PLANET WIPING.

BUT THEY'LL COME.

YOU HANDLE A POWER-SLAMMER WELL, GRANDFATHER, BUT CAN WE TRUST YOU?

YOU ARE A HUNTER. WE HAVE RENOUNCED THAT IDENTITY.

WITH YOUR PERMISSION, SIR, LET ME MINDBRIDGE WITH YOU. WE'LL SOON KNOW.

AS YOU WISH, SPHERE.

HE'S CLEAR.

LET'S GET BACK TO THE VILLAGE. WE'LL HAVE TO SEND OUT THE WORD TO EVERY-BODY.

SOUNDS LIKE WE'VE GOT SOME HEAVY THINKING TO DO.

I'VE HAD A CHANCE TO LOOK AROUND, SPHERE. YOU'VE HIDDEN YOUR EXISTENCE WELL...

...BUT IT'LL TAKE MONEY, GUNS, AND GUTS TO SAVE YOURSELVES.

WE'VE GOT THE GUTS, GRANDFATHER. HOW DO WE GET THE REST?

DO WHAT YOU DO BEST. FIGHT. THERE'S ALWAYS GOOD MONEY FOR GOOD FIGHTERS. AND THERE'S ALWAYS FIGHTING SOMEWHERE.

ADVERTISE. START BY FIGHTING CHEAP. YOU'LL BE WRITING YOUR OWN TICKET IN NO TIME.

BE PROVOCATIVE.

TAKE A NAME, SAY, FROM YOUR WEAPONS.

CALL YOURSELVES THE STAR SLAMMERS.

BUT KEEP YOUR HOME AND ORIGINS SECRET FROM ORION... AND OTHERS.

YOU WON'T MAKE MANY FRIENDS IN THAT LINE OF WORK.

WILL WE WIN?

WHO CAN SAY? YOUR ABILITY TO MINDBRIDGE HAS GIVEN ME AN IDEA. WHAT IF THE SLAMMERS COULD BRIDGE TOGETHER...

...INSTEAD OF AS INDIVIDUALS?

ALL THAT RANDOM THOUGHT REMINTED INTO ONE TIGHT BEAM OF CO-ORDINATED INFORMATION.

AN ENTIRE RACE, ACTING AS ONE UNIT.

IT COULD REMAKE HISTORY...

...OR PERHAPS NOT.

ETHON'S DIED PROVING THE SILVERMIND COULD EXIST. WILL IT EXIST WITHOUT HIM? WE'VE ALL BEEN THROUGH MIND-BRIDGES WITH YOU. TRIED TO BREAK THE MENTAL BARRIERS THAT KEEP US SEPARATE.

WHAT IF WE CAN'T DO IT AGAIN NOW THAT IT'S OUR LAST HOPE?

THEN YOU WILL HAVE WASTED YOUR FAITH IN ME AT OUR FIRST MEETING, SPHERE. I'M NOT A SLAMMER, ONLY A DISTANT RELATION.

MY INSTRUMENTS AND NEEDLES MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR SLAM-MERS TO MINDBRIDGE WITH ME:--

--NOTHING ELSE. YOU PUT YOUR ENTIRE WORLD ON THE LINE FOR A HUNCH.

WHY DID YOU TRUST ME?

YOU KNEW ABOUT THE SKY. YOU COULD USE A POWER SLAMMER.

THAT WAS WORTH SOMETHING, WASN'T IT?

GENERATIONS AGO, THERE WAS AN ORION WHO WIELDED A DEVASTATING SLAMMER.

"HE WAS WARRIOR CASTE AND STOOD AT THE EMPEROR'S RIGHT HAND.

"HE WAS MY ANCESTOR.

"WHEN HE FELL FROM FAVOR, HE STOOD ON HIS OWN TWO FEET... AND WAS EXILED HERE.

"SLAMMERS HAVE BEEN FOR-GOTTEN ON ORION. I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THEM.

"WHEN I HEARD SENATOR KRELLIK'S TALE, I HAD TO COME, TO SEE WHO WAS WIELDING THE SLAMMER AGAIN. TO FIND, AS THE 'LAY OF THE SLAMMER' SAYS, TRUE MEN."

KLANGKLANGKLANG

I FOUND THEM-- THE TRUE MEN MY PEOPLE HAD LONG CEASED TO BE--

--AND I HELPED THEM AS BEST I COULD.

NOW I CAN DIE IN PEACE.

YOU KNOW, GRANDFATHER, IT'S NOT THE DYING I FEAR. IT'S THE LOSING.

MEANWHILE, THROUGHOUT HOMEWORLD, THE EARTH SHAKES WITH THUNDER...

...AND THE SKY BEGINS TO FALL.

ORIONS ALERT! THIS IS ADMIRAL KRELLIK! PREPARE FOR IMMEDIATE PLANETWIPE!

PRIME THE SKUMBALLS FOR MAXIMUM ORGANIC DESTRUCTION AND RELEASE THEM AS THE EQUATOR COMES ONTO LINE.

"SKYBREAKER ONE HERE. WE HAVE TARGET ACQUISI-TION!"

"SKUM-BALLS AWAY!"

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT, BOYS?

ENEMY FORMATION COMING UP ON OUR SCREENS, ADMIRAL.

LOOK LIKE MOTHER-SHIPS.

OF COURSE THEY ARE!

FILLED WITH INTERCEPTORS! MAGNIFICENT!

OPEN THE NETWORK CHANNELS! THE HUNT IS ON!

WHUMP

WHUMP

WHUMP WHUMP

WHUMP WHUMP WHUMP

WHUMP WHUMP WHUMP

SPHERE TO ALL SLAMMERS! THIS IS THE MOMENT THE GRANDFATHER HAS BEEN LEADING US TOWARD!

WE'VE BEEN THERE ONCE! WE'VE GOT TO GET THERE AGAIN!

COMMENCE BRIDGE ATTEMPT! REACH FOR THE SILVERMIND!

JALAIA, CONTACT'S VERY WEAK. I'M NOT GETTING ANYTHING MORE THAN FAINT IMPRESSIONS.

I CAN'T FEEL THE SILVER-MIND BRIDGE AT ALL!

NEITHER CAN I. BUT WE DID IT BEFORE.

FOCUS YOUR THOUGHTS ON MINE!

THIS IS SLAMMER WING THREE. WE'VE GOT A SKUM-BARGE IN RANGE.

BEGINNING INTERCEPTION.

NICE SHOT, TAGGER...

...BUT I CAN'T HOLD CONTACT!

NEITHER CAN I. THE EXPLOSION'S BREAKING MY CONCENTRATION!

TRY TO MAIN-TAIN...

I'M LOSING THE BRIDGE...

ANOTHER SKUMBARGE...

I'VE GOT HIM TAR-GETED!

MISSED!

BANDITS, THREE O'CLOCK HIGH.

JALAIA?

TROUBLE, SPHERE. THE ORIONS HAVE RELEASED THEIR IN-TERCEPTORS.

THEY'RE ALL OVER MY SCREENS!

I CAN'T THINK WITH ALL THE SHIPS AROUND ME!

THE MINDBRIDGE IS SLIPPING!

...FIVE MORE SKUM-BARGES...

I'VE BEEN HIT!

THERE'S THE MAIN FLEET!

THEY'RE MOVING IN BEHIND THEIR IN-TERCEPTORS!

BEHIND YOU!

...LOSS OF POWER IN MY RIGHT...

...MINDBRIDGE GONE...

MORE ORIONS COMING IN!

THESE GUYS ARE THE STAR SLAMMERS?

THEY MUST HAVE TRULY FANTASTIC PR MEN!

NAILED ANOTHER ONE!

SPHERE! THE SILVERMIND'S NOT STARTING! WE AREN'T REACHING IT!

WE CAN'T LOSE! NOT LIKE THIS! THE HARDER WE TRY TO BRIDGE, THE WORSE WE FIGHT!

DID THE OLD MAN KNOW THIS WOULD HAPPEN?

HAVE WE BEEN SET UP ALL ALONG?

I DON'T BELIEVE IT! YOU KNOW HIM BETTER THAN ANY OF US, SPHERE.

HE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN LYING!

MAYBE, MAYBE NOT. BUT FOR EVERY HUNTER SHIP WE DESTROY...

...THREE MORE APPEAR!

DELTA WING HERE! THEIR WHOLE FLEET'S NEARLY IN STRIKE POSITION. WE CAN'T HOLD THEM ANY LONGER!

DAMNATION! FORGET THE SILVERMIND!

STAND YOUR GROUND AND FIGHT!

SPHERE'S RIGHT! PERHAPS WE ARE TRYING TOO HARD! BUT ETHON DID IT! HOW COULD HE...

JALAIA! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? GET BACK IN FORMATION!

I CAN'T HEAR YOU, SPHERE! TOO MUCH STATIC! BESIDES, I'VE GOT IT!

ETHON SHOWED US! HE GENERATED A MINDBRIDE AS HE WAS DYING!

BIGGER THAN ANYTHING WE'D EVER SEEN! SPHERE AND I CAUGHT IT AND RODE IT WITH HIM! MAYBE THAT'S THE KEY!

MAYBE THE SILVERMIND CAN ONLY BE REACHED BY THOUGHTS STRIPPED TO THE CORE IN A MIND FOCUSED RIGHT ON THE EDGE OF LIVING AND DYING!

SUCH A FOCUS COULD HAVE SHATTERED ETHON'S MIND SAFETIES, CARRIED HIM INTO THE SILVERMIND!

AND I'VE GOT TO FIND THAT FOCUS!

I'VE GOT TO GIVE THE HUNTERS A CLEAR SHOT--

--AND STAY ALIVE LONG ENOUGH TO STAND ON THE EDGE OF LIVING AND DYING, TOO.

ARRGH

CAN'T HOLD ON MUCH LONGER.

BUT I DON'T FEEL THE SILVER-MIND. WHY ISN'T IT HAPPENING?

ETHON! IF ONLY YOU...

SALUTATIONS, MIGHTY WARRIORS!

I WANTED TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO GREET YOU ALL BEFORE THE LAST OF YOU IS GONE! I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT FOR YEARS, YOU DOGS!

I SWORE I'D RETURN AND DEAL WITH YOU FOR WHAT YOU DID TO ME!

LOOK UPON ME NOW AND SEE YOUR DESTRUCTION WRITTEN IN MY FACE!...

...THE HUNTER WHO OBLITERATED THE VAUNTED STAR SLAMMERS!

ETHON! IT'S HIM!

THE ONE WHO SLEW YOUR PARENTS!

IT'S KRELLIK!

WE WAKE UP SINGIN' AND CRYIN'!

WE SEE... EVERYTHING!

WE SEE THE SKUMBALLS RELEASED!

WE SET BETA WING IN THEIR PATH BECAUSE THEY'RE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME!

WE DETONATE OUR BETA SHIPS, AND BLOW OURSELVES TO KINGDOM COME...

ABOVE US, THE HUNTER INTERCEPTORS HESITATE... CAUGHT BY BOTH SHOCK AND WAVE.

WE DO NOT HESITATE.

...DESTROYING EVERY SKUMBALL IN THE BATCH!

...AND BECAUSE WE KNOW WHERE EVERYTHING IS, WE METHODICALLY BEGIN TO ELIMINATE ANYTHING THAT OUGHT NOT TO BE THERE!

SOME OF US ARE HURT, BADLY, AND CAN NO LONGER FIGHT!

WE SEND THEM HOME.

BUT MOST OF US STAY BECAUSE WE LOVE THE FUN AND GAMES!

ANOTHER SKUMBARGE GONE, SIR. THERE'S ONLY US AND THE "CRINOLINE LEFT.

OUR FIGHTERS ARE BEING MAULED. FLEET CAPABILITY DOWN TO 23 PERCENT.

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED? ONE MINUTE, WE'VE GOT 'EM COLD, THE NEXT, WE'VE LOST OUR SHIRTS!

GET US DOWN ON THE DECK! WE'VE STILL GOT ENOUGH SKUMBALLS LEFT TO WIPE OUT THEIR MAIN BASE.

FLANK SPEED.

AND FOR GOD'S SAKE, KILL THE NETWORK BROADCAST!

WE'RE BUSY WIPING OUT WHAT WE THINK IS THE LAST SKUM-BARGE WHEN THROUGH JALAI'S EYES WE SEE SOMETHING LOOMING UP BEHIND HER FAR BELOW.

WE GET HER OUT OF THE WAY JUST IN TIME TO AVOID COLLISION AS IT FLASHES PAST...

CLOUD COVER ENDING, ADMIRAL.

COURSE IS LAID IN TO TAKE US RIGHT OVER THEIR MAIN BASE.

...AND IS GONE.

GOOD! SET THE SKUM-BALLS FOR MAXIMUM DIS-PERSAL. WE'RE GOING TO--

ADMIRAL KRELLIK! IT'S A WHOLE SQUADRON!

THEY'RE GOING TO GET US!

SIR, WHAT DO WE DO?

SNICKT

SIR?

THAT ONE ALMOST GOT AWAY FROM US.

BUT THERE AREN'T ANY SURVIVORS...

...ANYWHERE.

SO WE CONSULT TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THE ORION ARMADA HAS BEEN STOPPED HERE. BUT THERE'S STILL A PROBLEM. A PLANET FULL OF HUNTERS WHO KNOW WHERE WE LIVE AND WHAT WE CAN DO.

IN THIS JOB, WE WON'T MAKE ANY FRIENDS, AND WE'VE FOUND WE LIKE THE JOB. WE'RE GOOD AT IT.

WE WANT TO KEEP IT.

THE HUNTER'S KNOWLEDGE WILL BE VERY **DANGEROUS** TO US IN THE LONG RUN.

WE REALLY DON'T HAVE ANY OPTIONS.

SO WE BREAK FOR HOME. WE'VE GOT LOTS TO DO.

SPHERE, I'M HEADING IN.

JALAIA, HANG ON. I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOU.

YOU'RE ALMOST DOWN. NOW JUST EASE BACK AND-- JALAIA?

JALAIA!

JUMP

FALL

CRASH

JALAIA!

UHHH...

DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP DRIP

SPHERE, WE DID IT-- WE RAN THE SILVERMIND! THAT WAS WORTH DYING FOR, WASN'T IT?

YOU'RE GOING TO LIVE, JALAIA.

THE SILVERMIND WAS BORN OUT OF ETHON'S NEED. YOUR FAITH BROUGHT IT BACK, A FAITH ALL OF US CAN NOW SHARE.

THE SILVERMIND'S GOING TO BE EASIER TO REACH NEXT TIME. BUT WE NEED YOU. WE NEED YOU TO HELP US KEEP THE FAITH ALIVE.

IT IS NEARLY SUNDOWN BY THE TIME SPHERE REACHES HIS DESTINATION!

GRANDFATHER?

grandfather?

CLIK

SPHERE. I KNOW YOU WILL COME BACK WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED. JUST AS I KNOW WHAT YOU WILL HAVE COME TO TELL ME.

I AM WARRIOR CASTE, SPHERE. I NEEDED TO KNOW TRUE MEN.

I FOUND THEM. THEY BECAME MY CHILDREN. NOW, THEY WILL BECOME ADULTS BY SLAYING THEIR GREATEST ENEMY--MY PEOPLE.

THEY WILL DO THIS USING THE NAME AND THE WEAPON I HAVE PUT INTO THEIR HANDS.

BUT I AM STILL A HUNTER AND NO MAN SHOULD BE WITHOUT HIS PEOPLE.

BE WORTHY OF THE GREAT POWER IN YOUR HANDS, MY CHILDREN.

BE WELL, MY SON.

CLIK

ATTEN--SHUN!

BEFORE WE EMBARK, I'D LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS. THESE LAST WEEKS, WE'VE BEEN PREPARING FURIOUSLY FOR THE COMING ASSAULT ON ORION.

NOW, WE ARE READY.

BUT RUMOR HAS IT THAT THE GRANDFATHER HAS DEPARTED FROM HOME-WORLD. ABANDONED US, SOME SAY.

THE RUMORS ARE FALSE.

WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABANDONED.

THE GRAND-FATHER HAS GONE BECAUSE HE IS NO LONGER NEEDED.

WHEN HE CAME, WE WERE CHILDREN.

HE TAUGHT US TO GROW.

AND WITH THAT LESSON, HIS WORK HERE WAS FINISHED. HE HAS DEPARTED TO FIND OTHER CHILDREN WHO NEED HIM AS WE ONCE DID.

BUT HE HAS LEFT BEHIND HIS BLESSING.

HE HAS ENJOINED US TO BE WORTHY OF HIM.

HE HAS PUT INTO OUR HANDS THE WEAPON OF OUR EVENTUAL VICTORY.

HE HAS GIVEN US OUR NAME.

LET EVERY ONE AMONG US REMEMBER THIS...

...WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF HIS CHOICE.

WE MUST BECOME THE TRUE MEN OF HIS HEART!

SLAMMERS! ORION AWAITS!

ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS A RACE OF MEN WHO COULD OUT-SHOOT, OUT-FIGHT, AND OUT-KILL ANYBODY. THEY WERE PAID FABULOUS SUMS TO ACT AS MERCENARIES. THE PRACTICE BECAME SO LUCRATIVE, THEY DECIDED TO GO INTO BUSINESS. THEY BECAME THE MOST SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMEN IN HISTORY, AND THEY CALLED THEMSELVES...

THE STAR SLAMMERS

FOCUS
YOUR
THOUGHT
ON MINE

IT'S AN OLD, OLD STORY.

THE GOD OF WAR BECKONS...

...AND COUPLES MUST PART.

WHEN THE WORLD IS STILL BRIGHT IN THE FLUSH OF YOUTH...

...AND DEATH IS SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS ONLY TO OTHERS...

...TEARS ARE SHED AND THE TASTE OF SALT IS BITTER.

Fever Dream

HE SHOULDERED HIS GUN, PICKED UP HIS KIT, AND WALKED OFF TOWARD THE STARS.

HE NEVER SAW HER AGAIN.

LOSING BLOOD...

...STARTING TO SHAKE...

PTHOOM!
PTHOOM!
PTHOOM!
PTHOOM!
PTHOOM!
PTHOOM!

kklik!
kklik!

...DAMN!

GETTING TOO OLD FOR THIS.

I'M CUT OFF...

SLIKKTH!
SSWIITH!

...AND THE CAVERN'S FULL OF PLEISTS!

TOO LIGHT! ONLY ONE ROUND LEFT!

THE SLAMMER!

POW!

POW!

POW!

KILL HIM!

POW!

HE'S GETTING AWAY!

BLOW THE TUNNEL!

BLOW THE TUNNEL!

BLOW THE TUNNEL!

HE DIDN'T EVEN HEAR THE SOUND.

ROJAS! GET UP!

UHHH...

...WHERE AM I?

GEEZUS, I FEEL AWFUL!

HAVE TO WARN THE REST OF THE DIVISION!

CAVERNS'RE MINED!

GOT TO CONTACT THE SILVER-MIND!

WE HEAR YOU, ROJAS! NOW MOVE!

CLIMB! TO YOUR LEFT!

...BUT...

IT'S A COLLECTIVE MENTAL FUSION, ALL RIGHT, BUT I DON'T RECOG-NIZE IT!

WHO ARE YOU?

KEEP CLIMBING! YOU'RE ALMOST OUT!

WE ARE YOUR KIN.

FATHER? GREAT GRAND-MOTHER?

WHO AM I TALKING TO? THEY'VE BEEN DEAD FOR YEARS!

NOT MUCH TIME! HURRY!

JUMP!

UGHH!

THE SPLASH OF THE FALLING ROCKS ECHOES DISTANTLY BELOW...

I'M LOSING IT! IT CAN'T BE THE SILVER-MIND!

MAYBE ANOTHER PLEIST TRAP!

I'VE GOT TO WARN THE SLAMMERS!

THEY WILL BE WARNED.

WHO ARE YOU?

LOOK UP.

YOUR ARMOR ...IT'S OLD! ANCIENT!

I AM ANCIENT, ROJAS.

A FRAGMENT OF THE PAST...

...YOUR PAST.

IMPOSSIBLE. I DON'T KNOW YOU.

YOU DO.

HEAD'S START-ING TO SWIM...

YOU MUST GET UP, ROJAS. MY NAME IS **JALAIA.**

CAN'T BE. THERE'S ONLY **ONE** JALAIA, AND SHE WAS **FIRST BLOOD!** SHE LIVED CENTURIES AGO!

I AM NO LONGER ALIVE, ROJAS. YOU ARE MY DISTANT CHILD...

...AND YOU **HAVE** REACHED THE SILVERMIND... THE SILVERMIND OF THE **DEAD.**

THE **DEAD?!** AM I ...?

NOT YET, ROJAS. WE'VE COME TO **HELP** YOU.

TAKE THE **RIGHT-** HAND OPENING!

BUT WE NEED **YOUR** HELP, TOO. RILLA HAS NOT YET JOINED US.

RILLA?! WHAT DO **YOU** KNOW OF MY **WIFE?!**

IMPOSSIBLE! SHE **VAN-ISHED** MORE THAN EIGHTY **YEARS** AGO!

I SEARCHED FOR HER! I FOUND **NOTHING!**

NEVERTHELESS ...ON YOUR **RIGHT** ...A **PLEIST!**

WE KNOW THAT SHE NO LONGER LIVES...

...BUT NEITHER IS SHE **DEAD.**

SHE HAS NOT RIDDEN THE **FIRESTORM**...SHE HAS **NOT** FOUND PEACE.

KRAK

WHAK!

YOU'RE OUT OF AMMUNITION!

THROW YOUR GUN!

RILLA IS STILL OUT THERE. SOMEWHERE.

I DON'T BELIEVE YOU!

STRAIGHT AHEAD! YOU'RE ALMOST CLEAR!

HEY!

THERE HE IS!

THOOM!

I SPEAK THE **TRUTH**, ROJAS. IT IS NOT YOUR FAULT.

BUT IT MUST BE YOUR **DESTINY.**

FIND HER. ...**HELP** HER ...DO NOT **FORGET** HER.

I HAVE **NEVER** FORGOTTEN HER!

GOOD.

NOW **RUN**, ROJAS! TOWARDS THE **LIGHT! RUN!**

FIND HER, ROJAS... HELP HER RIDE THE FIRESTORM...

...THE FIRESTORM...

THOOM!

...THE FIRE-STORM...

THROOOM!

...THE ...FIRE ...HUH?

WHAT...? WHERE ?

WELCOME BACK, SOLDIER.

THOUGHT WE WERE GONNA LOSE YOU THERE.

PLEISTS'RE USING SOME NEW **BIOLOGICAL** AGENT, BUT YOUR FEVER'S BROKEN.

YOU'RE A **HERO.** YOU ACCESSED THE SILVERMIND, AND NOW WE'VE GOT THE PLEISTS **TRAPPED.**

DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DID IT, BURNING UP LIKE THAT. **GREAT** JOB!

THANKS. I DIDN'T THINK I REALLY--

TELL ME SOMETHING, NURSE...

...YOU EVER... TALK TO THE **DEAD?**

I'VE **SEEN** A LOT OF DEAD. SO FAR, NO-BODY'S SAID A WORD.

YOU'VE HAD A BAD FEVER, COMMANDER. **REAL** BAD.

A FEVER. YEAH.

I HEAR THERE'S A JOB GOING DOWN OUT IN THE MINOAN EMPIRE.

SCUTTLEBUTT SAYS YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO LEAD ONE OF THE GREENIE SQUADS, IF YOU'RE UP TO IT. SHOULD BE A MILK RUN.

GOOD. MAKE A NICE CHANGE.

WHO KNOWS? AFTER THAT, I MIGHT START THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT.

I'VE JUST DISCOVERED SOME OLD, UNFINISHED BUSINESS I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I HAD.

WHEN THE MINOAN JOB'S DONE, MAYBE I'LL GO OUT TO THE STARS ...ONE LAST TIME.

FOR MARK-THANKS, PAL!

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come...

Wm. Shakespeare

IT WASN'T THE SLEEP OF DEATH...

...BUT IT WAS AS NEAR AS DAMMIT.

EVEN THE SUBLEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS WERE SHUT DOWN.

STILL, THE DREAMS WERE DANCING.

NOBODY SHUTS DOWN THE DREAMS.

the minoan agendas

chapter one: THE PRISONER

THE UPROAR OF THE LOADOUT WAS DEAFENING.

AS ALWAYS, THERE WERE PLENTY OF RUMORS...

...AND FEW FACTS.

KLANG! CLANG!

THRING! THRING!

BANG! BOOM!

I HEAR WE'RE TACKLING THE **CARCOSANS.**

NO **KIDDING.** THEY'VE GOT A COUPLE OF BATTALIONS OF CYBER-ARMORED SKIMMERS.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT.

THIS AIN'T NO FULL-SCALE LAUNCH. IT'S GOTTA BE A **BRUSH FIRE** SOMEWHERE THEY WANT US TO PUT OUT.

I SAW 'EM LOADIN' A COUPLE DOZEN DROPSHIPS. PROBABLY QUICK IN, QUICK OUT.

WHAT DO **YOU** THINK, COMMANDER ROJAS?

TO WORRY ANY MORE, SHELLY.

I'VE BEEN WRONG TOO MANY TIMES ABOUT IT

I JUST CHECK MY WEAPONS AND KEEP MY THOUGHTS TO MYSELF.

STRAP IN. WE'RE GETTING READY TO HOP.

SKREEEEALL!

SEVERAL HYPERJUMPS AND FIVE BRIEFINGS LATER...

"ENTERING EQUATORIAL ORBIT."

"SHIELDS TO FULL POWER."

"ELIMINATING DEFENSIVE SATELLITES!"

"T-MINUS FIVE MINUTES TO LAUNCH!"

"FUEL TANKS TOPPED OFF!"

"BOARD IS GREEN!"

"DROP TROOPS TO READY STATIONS!"

"DID YOU CATCH THOSE **SATELLITES?**"

"THEY WERE ANCIENT **G-2'S!** MAN, THIS PLACE REALLY **IS** IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE!

THUMM!

"ORDNANCE LOADING COMPLETE!"

"ESCORTS BEGIN LAUNCH SEQUENCE!"

"SHOULD BE DUCK SOUP!"

"T-MINUS ONE MINUTE!"

"KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, CHARLIE!"

"BOARD IS STILL GREEN!"

"TARGET CITY ACQUISITION!"

THUMM!

"ESCORTS AWAY!"

"DROP-SHIPS LAUNCH!"

TRUHROOM! TRUHROOM!

"INITIATE SILVERMIND!"

"NO FLAK! WE CAUGHT 'EM COMPLETELY OFF GUARD!"

"JUMPTROOPS, GREEN LIGHT! GO!"

PHUMM! PHUMM!

LET'S TAKE 'EM!

ROCK AND ROLL!

FIGHTER COVER COMING IN!

BREAK LEFT! BREAK LEFT!

I DON'T GET IT!

THE LOCALS ARE JUST STANDING THERE!

WE'RE GONNA SLAUGHTER THEM AND THEY'RE NOT EVEN MOVING!

PHOUM! PHOUM! PHOUM! PHOUM!

FIRST RUN COMPLETED! RE-TARGETING FOR RUN TWO! I'M MAKING...

FFHUUHAM!

OOOO

SOMETHING'S WRONG! THE SILVERMIND'S BREAKING UP...

...AND OUR SHIPS ARE FALLING OUT OF THE SKY!

CONCENTRATE ALL FIREPOWER ON THOSE STANDING LOCALS! HURRY!

ROJAS! ONE OF OUR ESCORTS IS COMING IN HARD!

HE'S NOT GONNA MAKE IT!

SHELLY, PULL 'EM BACK. NOW!

BLAST!

SCREEEE

IT WASN'T.

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...AND FEW FACTS.

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THRING! THRING!

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"SHOULD BE DUCK SOUP!"

"T-MINUS ONE MINUTE!"

THUMM! THUMM!

"KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, CHARLIE!"

"BOARD IS STILL GREEN!"

"TARGET CITY ACQUISITION!"

SIR! I'VE GOT BOGIES APPEARING ALL OVER THE SCREEN!

SOME SORT OF OFFENSIVE SATELLITES!

MAIN BATTERIES TRACKING!

THOSE ARE MOONDOGGERS! HI-TECH HUNTER-KILLERS!

HOLY --!

THEY'RE BREAKING THROUGH THE DE-FENSIVE SCREENS!

STASIS COFFINS, **FAST!**

TOO LATE! HERE THEY **COME!**

THESE SHOULDN'T BE HERE! WHAT THE HELL IS GOING **ON?!**

KABLOOM!

THE LIGHT SHOW WAS FANTASTIC!

LIKE WOW!

TOTALLY AWESOME, MAN!

I GOTTA REBOOT AND REPLAY!

THIS IS JUST TOOOOO COOL!

BUT THIS TIME, I'LL GIVE THE SLAMMERS SUBATOMIC **DISRUPTORS!**

IT'LL BE **GREAT!**

AS ALW... THERE WER... PLENTY OF RUMORS..

...AND FEW FACTS.

KLANG! CLANG!

THRING! THRING!

BANG!

BOOM!

...R WE'RE ...NG THE ...SANS.

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I DON'T BELIEVE IT.

THIS AIN'T NO FULL-SCALE LAUNCH. IT'S GOTTA BE A **BRUSH FIRE** SOME-WHERE THEY WANT US TO PUT OUT.

"I HOPE THIS TRIP TAKES **FOREVER!**"

USUALLY, THE MEREDITH CARRIES VITAL SUPPLIES FROM THE INNER CYCLADS TO THE OUTER SPORADEES SYSTEMS OF THE CLUSTER.

BUT **THIS** TIME, ALONG WITH HER USUAL CARGO OF HEAVY METALS, FINISHED INDUSTRIAL GOODS, AND MIGRANT WORKERS...

WE INTERRUPT "THE STARS MY DESTINATION" TO BRING YOU A SPECIAL NETWORK HOLOCAST NEWS BRIEF.

HERE IN THE GREATER MINOAN CO-PROSPERITY CLUSTER, EXCITEMENT IS RUNNING HIGH AS THE IMPERIAL CRUISER **MEREDITH** WENDS ITS WAY SLOWLY HOME AMONG THE STARS.

...THE MEREDITH IS CARRYING SOMETHING INFINITELY MORE VALUABLE, A CARGO WITHOUT PRECEDENT IN HISTORY.

A LIVE **STAR SLAMMER!**

YES. I SAID A **LIVE** STAR SLAMMER, ONE OF THE MOST DANGER-OUS **KILLERS** IN THE COSMIC BROTHERHOOD!

MYSTERIOUS WARRIORS FROM AN UNKNOWN PLANET, THE SLAMMERS HAVE BEEN THE SCOURGE OF THE KNOWN UNIVERSE FOR A MILLENNIUM!

ANY MORE COFFEE?

A HARD-HITTING NEWS SPECIAL FROM NETWORK HOLOCAST OF RUMOR, INNUENDO, SPECULATION, AND GOSSIP ABOUT THE SLAMMERS WILL BE BROADCAST IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THIS ANNOUNCE-MENT.

DURING THE RECENT AND TOTALLY **UNPRO-VOKED** ATTACK BY THE STAR SLAMMERS...

...THAT DESTROYED THE LITTLE VILLAGE OF **SKY** ON THE AGRARIAN PLANET SCYROS IN THE SPORADEES...

...A SLAMMER WAS CAPTURED **ALIVE** BY THE VALIANT AND RESOURCEFUL MILITARY FORCES OF OUR **BELOVED** EMPEROR PHAISTOS THE 24TH.

BECAUSE OF THE-- **SQUCCK!**

KEERIST! WHAT **JUNK!**

KICK IT!

KICK!

SQUUCKK!...THE SLAMMER IS BEING BROUGHT BACK TO THE IMPERIAL CAPITOL KNOSSOS...

...WHERE A FAIR AND IMPARTIAL TRIAL ON A VARIETY OF WAR CRIMES' CHARGES WILL DECIDE HIS FATE.

CAN YOU SAY... HIGH JUMP?

JERK.

LET'S HOPE TO GOD HOLO-CAST'S ONLY BROADCASTING **LOCALLY.**

IF THIS IS GOING OUT OVER SUBSPACE, THE SLAMMERS'LL BE BACK HERE FASTER'N LIGHT TO PULL THEIR GUY OUT. AND PROBABLY NAIL US.

MIGHT AS WELL BROADCAST OUR EXACT COORDINATES!

IN THIS JUNKER, WE COULDN'T OUTRUN A LUGOVIAN SLO-WORM!

AT THAT MOMENT, SOMEWHERE IN KNOSSOS IN A SECRET LOCATION...

I AM PLEASED TO REPORT THAT PHASES ONE AND TWO HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED.

OUR COVERT AGENTS ARE IN PLACE AND THE MEREDITH IS APPROACHING THE HALFWAY POINT ON ITS JOURNEY TO THE INNER SYSTEMS.

COMPLETE TECHNICAL BLUEPRINTS OF THE SHIP HAVE BEEN OBTAINED AND PASSED ON TO OUR AGENTS IN THE FIELD.

THE SHIP'S PROGRESS IS BEING CAREFULLY MONITORED...

...AND WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, THE CAPTIVE SLAMMER WILL BE KILLED.

ALONG WITH HIS GUARDS.

WE HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED THE COOPERATION OF CERTAIN BRANCHES OF THE NEWS MEDIA.

IN THE CONFUSION THAT FOLLOWS THE SLAMMER'S DEATH, WE WILL BE ABLE NOT ONLY TO BREAK THE STORY BUT TO BROADCAST OUR **OWN** VIDS OF THE CATASTROPHE, GRAPHIC VIDS.

WE WILL DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN THE POPULATION AND THE EMPEROR THAT NO AMOUNT OF SOPHISTICATED MEDIA MANAGEMENT WILL BE ABLE TO OVERCOME.

AND IN THE END, THE EMPIRE WILL BE **OURS!**

MEANWHILE...

MAIN BATTERIES TRACKING! **FIRE!**

MOON-DOGGERS THIRD WAVE DESTROYED!

GRAVITY WELL MATERIAL-IZING! **PORT** SIDE!

IT'S A WARP-MINE! SHIELDS TO FULL POWER!

SIR! WE'RE **BURNED!** ENERGY LEVELS ARE **ZERO!**

WHERE'S THIS STUFF **COMING** FROM?

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING **ON?!**

SMASH

OUT-STAND-ING!

ACCESSING THE PRISONER'S MIND, ARE WE, VIDIOT?

FOOF!

HUH?

DON'T CALL ME VIDIOT, COLONEL PHAEDRA. I DON'T LIKE IT. MY NAME IS RENSSELAER LUSTGARTEN.

I DON'T CARE **WHAT** YOU LIKE, RENSSE-LAER!

YOU'RE ON BOARD THIS SHIP FOR ONE REASON AND ONE REASON **ONLY**...TO MONITOR THAT SLAMMER 24 HOURS A DAY UNTIL WE GET TO KNOSSOS.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL, COLONEL? HE'S **TOAST** AND YOU KNOW IT!

UNTIL WE GET TO KNOSSOS, GAME BOY, HE'S **MINE** AND DON'T YOU **FORGET** IT!

SIMON SOFT 4.2.94

YOU SCREW THIS UP, I WILL PERSONALLY SEND YOU HOME IN A PINE BOX!

I'M A 12TH LEVEL TELEPATH. THE EMPEROR'S PRIVATE **ACCESSORY.**

NOBODY TALKS TO **ME** LIKE THAT!

NO-BODY!

BLAKK!

ONE MORE TIME.

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, YOU ARE A THIRTEEN-YEAR-OLD VIDEO GAME JUNKIE WITH A FREAK SHOW TALENT AND **NO** SOCIALLY REDEEMING VALUE. PERIOD.

THAT SLAMMER'S MORE **DANGEROUS** THAN ANY GAME YOU EVER **PLAYED!** HE'S PROBABLY BRAIN-MINED AND YOU JUST HAVEN'T GONE DEEP ENOUGH YET TO FIND IT!

I WANT HIM **MONITORED,** NOT **ACCESSED!**

IF HE **ESCAPES,** EVEN THE EMPEROR WON'T BE ABLE TO SAVE YOU! **GOT IT?**

YES, **SIR!**

C'MON, YOU BULLS! I WANT A DRINK.

YOU THINK HE'LL STOP, SIR?

WASTE OF BREATH, REALLY. ACCESSORIES PRETTY MUCH DO ANYTHING THEY WANT.

BUT ACCESSING A SLAMMER'S MIND WITHOUT PROPER SAFEGUARDS? "**VIDIOT**" IS RIGHT!

COLONEL, THE GUY IS DRUGGED ALMOST TO DEATH, STRAPPED IN AN ISOLATION CAGE...

...HUNG UP LIKE A CHANDELIER, AND GUARDED 24 HOURS A DAY.

YOU REALLY THINK THERE'S A PROBLEM?

ANY LIVE SLAMMER IS A REAL PROBLEM, CORPORAL.

BUT THE WHOLE THING LEAVES A CRUMMY TASTE IN MY MOUTH.

IT'S NO WAY FOR A WARRIOR TO GO.

DON'T EVEN THINK IT. THAT'S PHAEDRA OF TEAM NOVA. SHE EATS GUYS LIKE YOU FOR PRACTICE!

THAT'S IT.

I'M **OUTTA** HERE.

UHHHH.

YOU WHISTLING AT MY COLONEL, MISTER? 'CAUSE IF YOU ARE--

I'LL HANDLE THIS, PRIVATE STARK.

CAN I HELP YOU?

WELL...UH...WHAT I MEAN IS...UH...I JUST WONDERED... UH... HOW'S ABOUT... UH... YOU...AND... UHH... ME...

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT. HOW VERY ORIGINAL.

YOW!

SHIIIIIP!

ZIPP! ZIPP! ZIPP!

KURUUNCH!

SORRY, SIR. DIDN'T MEAN TO STEP OUT OF LINE.

YOU WERE GREAT!

THANK YOU, PRIVATE!

MY SHIFT'S OVER, DUMMY. THAT'LL BE 17 DRACHS FOR THE DRINKS...

...AND 250 FOR THE **STOOL.**

SILENCE.

THE GENTLE VIBRATION OF THE STAR DRIVE...

...THE OCCASIONAL CREAK OF THE FLEXING HULL...

...THE SOFT, CRACKLE OF THE VIDEO SCREEN...

...THESE ARE THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE ABOARD THE MEREDITH.

EVEN THE SNAP OF THE FIRST BREAKING NECK DOES LITTLE TO DISTURB IT.

KRIKKA!

NOR DOES THE SOFT POP OF THE FIRST SHATTERED TEMPLE...

...OR THE SECOND NECK...

...OR THE SECOND TEMPLE.

IT'S OVER IN SECONDS.

CHLICK!

GRANGG!
GRANGG!
GRANGG!
GRANGG!
GRANGG!

KHANGG!

THERE HAS TO BE A LOT OF BLOOD.

THERE WAS.

RIPP! SPLUNNNG! KATHANNG! RIPP!

WHOOOSHHH! WHSSSHH!

ARRRRR RRRGGGGGG GGGGH!

SEVEN BANDITS, TEN O'CLOCK HIGH.

ALL RIGHT! BATTLE COMPUTER ON!

RANGE: 30,000!

SPEED: POINT EIGHT LIGHT.

INTERCEPT PLOTTED.

ENGAGE!

WAY COOL! IT'S A DROPSHIP! I LOVE THIS GUY'S MIND!

TARGET LOCK ACHIEVED.

AWE-SOME! NAIL HIM!

ARRRRR RRGGGG GGHHHH!

SPRACK!

YOWWWW!

SKRAKKLE!

SLIPP!

SKITT!

UHHH... WHAT--?

MY GAME BOARDS. FRIED!

WHAT THE HECK WAS THAT?

I WONDER IF...?

OH NO! OH, GOD! NO!

JEZUSSS! HE'S NOT THERE!

HE'S NOT ANY-WHERE ON THE SHIP!

SHE'S GONNA KILL ME!

THAKK!

WHOOP!WHOOP!WHOOP!WHOOP!

THE ONE **GOOD** THING ABOUT THIS WHOLE MESS IS, WHEN THAT SLAMMER'S **EXECUTED...**

THOSE SPORA-DEES' **SCUM**'LL KNOW THAT THE EMPEROR MEANS **BUSINESS!**

ESPECIALLY WITH **SKY** DESTROYED.

BEEP! BOOP! BEEP!

BUT I'LL BE GLAD WHEN THIS TRIP IS OVER!

PHAEDRA AND HER SPACE BULLS ARE MAKING ME **NERVOUS!** AND HAVING A LIVE SLAMMER ABOARD GIVES ME A **HEADACHE!**

UH, CAPTAIN ...?

THANG! THANG! THANG! THANG! THANG! THANG! THANG!

"I THINK OUR HEADACHES ARE JUST **BEGINNING!"**

RED ALERT! RED ALERT! RED ALERT!

IF THE PRISONER IS GONE, I WILL ROAST VIDIOT **ALIVE!**

WEAPONS ON **KILL!**

IF WE'RE LUCKY, WE **MIGHT** GET A SHOT AT HIM!

TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP-TAP!

THUNK-THUNK-THUMP!

UH! UH! UH! UH! UH! UH!

VIDIOT! TALK TO ME! WHO'S INSIDE?

DON'T KILL ME, COLONEL! OH, PLEASE ...DON'T KILL ME! I COULDN'T HELP IT!

RENSSELEAR!

ONE SECOND HE WAS THERE! AND THE NEXT, HE WASN'T! JEZUS, PLEASE DON'T KILL ME!

THEY'RE ALL DEAD! THEY'RE LIKE ...REALLY DEAD!

LOOK!

PRIVATE STARK! OPEN THAT DOOR!

YES, SIR!

BANG!

RACHETE!

CLICK! SNAPP!

ohmygod!

CHOKE!

GAMES **OVER,** RENSSELAER. THIS IS THE REAL THING AND IT'S YOUR TURN. COME HERE.

OH, **NO.** PLEASE, COLONEL!

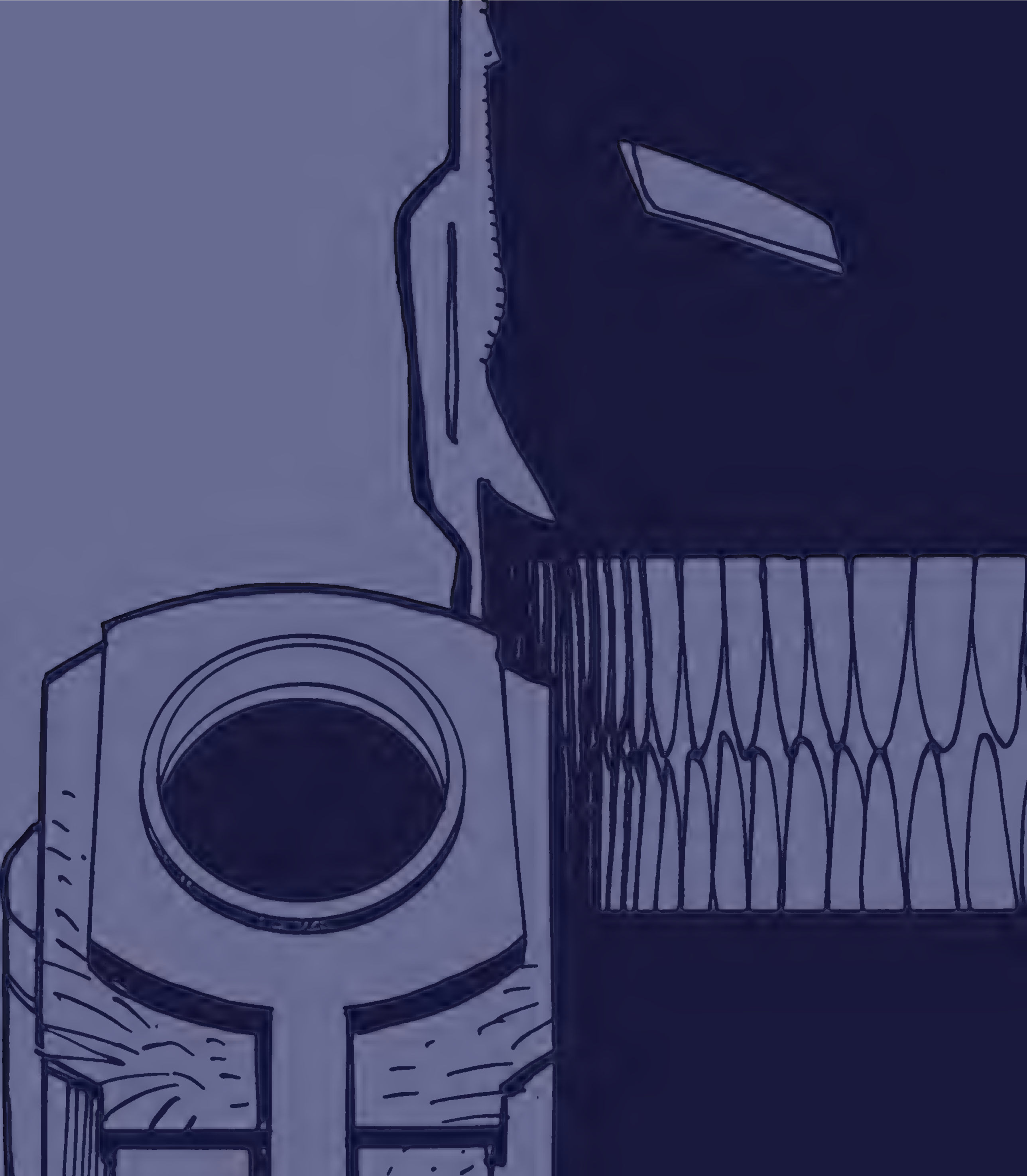
PULL YOURSELF **TOGETHER.**

YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO ACCESS THE BODIES WHILE THEY'RE STILL WARM.

AS IN RIGHT **NOW!**

NEXT ISSUE - THE EMPIRE

IN WHICH THE DEAD GIVE UP THEIR SECRETS... AND THE EMPIRE RECEIVES A BODY BLOW.



the minoan agendas

chapter two: THE EMPIRE!

THE DEAD WERE ALMOST CERTAINLY ALREADY IN HELL.

THE LIVING WERE PROBABLY ON THEIR WAY.

NECKS'RE BROKEN, COLONEL. TEMPLES SHATTERED. LOOKS LIKE EMPTY HAND TECHNIQUE.

SEEMS LIKE HE NAILED 'EM BEFORE HIS WOUNDS DID HIM IN.

IMPOSSIBLE! NOT EVEN A SLAMMER COULD HAVE--!

COLONEL **PHAEDRA!** THE **CAGE** CHAMBER DOOR'S AJAR! SOMEBODY MIGHT BE--

KICK IT OPEN, PRIVATE STARK! I'LL COVER YOU!

KREEAACKK!

YES, SIR!

THE STARSHIP **MEREDITH** IS HEADING HOME TO KNOSSOS, CAPITOL OF THE MINOAN EMPIRE...

...A THIRD CLUSTER CONFEDERATION ON THE GALACTIC RIM.

SHE'S CARRYING A CARGO OF PASSENGERS, INDUSTRIAL GOODS, RAW MATERIAL...

...AND A CAPTURED **STAR SLAMMER.**

THERE'S BEEN A HITCH.

ROOM'S EMPTY, SIR.

WHAT'S GOING **ON** HERE?

WHO SOUNDED THAT ALARM?

WE HAVE A **SITUATION,** CAPTAIN SALARDO.

UNTIL WE KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING, I'LL HAVE TO ASK YOU TO **RETURN** TO THE BRIDGE.

I WANT EVERYTHING TO APPEAR NORMAL ABOARD SHIP.

AS COMMANDER OF TEAM NOVA, CAPTAIN, I HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO TAKE CHARGE IN AN EMERGENCY.

WHAT? WHO DO YOU--?

AND I'M **EXERCISING** IT.

PRIVATE RALLE, ESCORT THE CAPTAIN TOPSIDE. AND OPEN A **SCRAMBLED** CHANNEL TO KNOSSOS.

I'LL BE UP SHORTLY.

AFTER YOU, SIR.

HEY!

WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME, VIDIOT!

YOU'RE GOING TO ACCESS THE MINDS OF MY DEAD SOLDIERS. AND THE SLAMMER.

I WANT TO KNOW **EXACTLY** HOW HE GOT LOOSE!

AT **ONCE!**

BUT, COLONEL, ACCESSING **DEAD** MINDS? I COULD BE SUCKED IN AND **WIPED OUT!** IT'S **DANGEROUS!**

KLIK!

WHO'S FIRST?

SERGEANT TILTON. HE WAS IN CHARGE.

UHHHH... FIRST LEVEL... NOTHING.

UHHHH... SECOND LEVEL... NOTHING.

NOT EVEN RESID-UALS.

HOW **LONG** HAVE THESE GUYS BEEN **DEAD?**

MINUTES. NO MORE.

I DON'T GET IT.

IT'S... LIKE THEY'VE BEEN DEAD A LONG TIME! UHHH... THIRD LEVEL... FOURTH LEVEL... I.., UHHH... I...

YOWWW!

WHAT IS IT?

HE WAS **HIT!** **KILLED!** SOME SORT OF... **BURST!** THERE'S NOTHING ELSE!

THERE'S NO WEAPON ANYWHERE, COLONEL. PLACE'S **CLEAN.**

THE SLAMMER NEXT, VIDIOT! **HURRY!**

WHILE HE'S STILL **WARM!**

NOBODY SAID ANYTHING ABOUT ACCESSING **DEAD** GUYS WHEN THEY SENT ME HERE!

"FIRST LEVEL... SOME STATIC.

"SECOND LEVEL...THERE'S STUFF STILL HERE, BUT IT'S FADING.

"LOTS OF **KILLING.**

"MORE STATIC. GOTTA GO DEEPER!... LEVEL THREE...

"GEEZ! **DARK!** HARD TO READ! STATIC! MEN! WOMEN! **KIDS!** HE'S--

"IT'S REAL **NASTY.**"

"VIDIOT? DON'T GO ANY DEEPER! HE COULD BE **MINED!**"

"I CAN **DO** THIS, COLONEL!"

"RENSSELAER! **NO!** GET OUT **NOW!** THAT'S AN **ORDER!**"

"YOU GUYS ALL MAKE **FUN** OF ME, BUT **I'LL** SHOW YOU!"

"PRIVATE STARK! **GRAB** HIM! BREAK THE **CONTACT!**"

"I'M ALMOST THERE!"

HE'S--!

ARRRRR GGGGGG GHHHHHH!

NO OOOOO!

KID!

RENSSELAER!

WHRAAPPP!

TEETH! BIG TEETH! LIKE **BEFORE!** THAT'S JUST WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THE **SLAMMER** DISAPPEARED!

UH OH.

BUT I CAN'T READ **ANYTHING** NOW!

IT'S GONE! MY POWER'S **GONE!**

I'M A **DEADHEAD!** LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE!

THE EMPEROR'LL **KILL** US BOTH FOR THIS!

HE MAY NOT GET THE CHANCE!

COLONEL, WHAT ARE YOU--?

FALSE FLESH, PRIVATE. THIS ISN'T THE SLAMMER. IT JUST LOOKS LIKE HIM.

BUT WHO --?

AN **ASSASSIN!** GUILD, PROBABLY.

BRIBED OR FINESSED HIS WAY ON BOARD.

THAT'S WHERE THE WEAPON CAME FROM.

BUT IF **THIS** ISN'T THE SLAMMER ...?

YOU GOT THAT RIGHT, PRIVATE! HE'S **LOOSE!**

SERGEANT KALI! I WANT **LIFEPOD** BAYS GUARDED AROUND THE CLOCK.

DRAFT THE MEREDITH'S SECURITY TEAMS IF YOU NEED HELP.

SECURE ALL AIRLOCKS. DISABLE ALL AUTOMATIC EJECTION CHUTES.

YES, SIR!

NOBODY'S LEAVING THIS SHIP! ON THE **DOUBLE!**

AND IN A CORRIDOR NOT FAR AWAY...

THE ASSASSIN WAS WEARING A BODYSUIT, BUT ABOARD A SHIP LIKE THIS, HE MUST HAVE BEEN DISGUISED.

HE COULDN'T WANDER AROUND VERY FAR IN WARPAINT.

AH **HA!**

VENTILATOR SHAFT.

AND A BAG OF GOODIES.

HIS CIVILIAN ID. **PERFECT!**

ELSEWHERE...

WE SHOULD HAVE HEARD FROM OUR PRINCIPAL AGENT ABOARD THE MEREDITH BY NOW!

I KNEW INVOLVING THE SLAMMERS WAS A **BAD** IDEA! THEY SHOULD HAVE ATTACKED THE EMPIRE AND KNOSSOS DIRECTLY!

THE ATTACK ON SKY WAS A **PERFECT** IDEA! WHO COULD HAVE FORESEEN THAT THE SLAMMERS WOULD HAVE HAD SOME SORT OF **SCREENING** DEVICE.

AS IT IS, COLLATERAL DAMAGE WAS--

GENTLEMEN! **GENTLEMEN!** SAVE THE RE-CRIMINATIONS FOR LATER. WE HAVE ACCESS.

THIS IS SONG-BIRD.

I HAVE ONLY A LITTLE TIME. THE PRECISE SITUATION ABOARD THE MEREDITH IS UNSTABLE.

CLARIFY **"UNSTABLE".**

IT APPEARS THAT THE ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE THE SLAMMER WAS ONLY PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL.

HIS GUARDS WERE ELIMINATED, BUT NO VIDEO OF THE SLAUGHTER WAS OBTAINED. HOWEVER, THEIR BRAINS HAVE BEEN WIPED AND THERE SHOULD BE NO REPERCUSSIONS.

OUR ASSASSIN?

DEAD, AND WIPED. FORWARD THE APPROPRIATE DOCU-MENTATION TO THE GUILD FOR THEIR INSURANCE CLAIMS.

AND THE SLAMMER?

AT LARGE ABOARD THE SHIP. I HAVE HIM LOCATED.

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? THE SLAMMER WAS COMPLETELY **INERT!**

UNCLEAR. I HAVE LEARNED THAT THE EMPEROR'S PERSONAL ACCESSORY, RENSSELAER LUST-GARTEN, CAME ABOARD AT THE LAST MINUTE.

HIS ROLE IS ALSO UNCLEAR, BUT HE HAS BEEN NEUTRALIZED.

COLONEL PHAEDRA MAY HAVE SOME CLUES, BUT AS YOU KNOW, SHE HAS NEVER BEEN SUC-CESSFULLY ACCESSED.

PERHAPS WITH ADDITIONAL TIME AND EFFORT...

WE HAVE EXPENDED A **GREAT** DEAL OF EFFORT AND THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME LEFT. WE SHOULD--

SPRACKRRTTTT!

WHAT WAS THAT?

SOME SORT OF MENTAL ENERGY BURST!

TRACK THE SOURCE!

TOO LATE! IT'S ALREADY GONE!

IT WAS IDENTICAL TO THE SLAMMERS' SCREEN INTERFERENCE AT SKY!

IMPOSSIBLE!

WE MUST STEP UP OUR TIMETABLE!

SONGBIRD! THE SLAMMER MUST BE KILLED BEFORE HE COMMUNICATES WITH ANYONE!

AND THE COMLINK ABOARD THE MEREDITH MUST BE DISABLED!

WE'LL INITIATE PHASE FOUR IMMEDIATELY!

VERY WELL! IT SHALL BE DONE!

MEANWHILE, AT THE VERY HEART OF THE MINOAN EMPIRE IN THE HIGH COURT OF THE EMPEROR PHAISTOS THE 24TH...

WHAT'S THIS I HEAR, PHAEDRA? THE SLAMMER'S ESCAPED?

I AM DISAPPOINTED IN YOU.

WITH GOOD REASON, MY LIEGE. I ACCEPT FULL RESPONSIBILITY. AN ASSASSIN INSINUATED HIMSELF ABOARD THE SHIP.

THE ASSASSIN IS DEAD. THE SLAMMER IS STILL ABOARD, I AM SURE OF IT.

IT WASN'T MY FAULT, YOUR MAJESTY!

BE QUIET, CAPTAIN SALARDO.

WHY IN THE BULL'S NAME DID THE STAR SLAMMERS ATTACK SKY IN THE FIRST PLACE? NOT THAT I MIND HAVING IT DESTROYED, BUT I LIKE TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON!

NOBODY EVER TELLS ME ANYTHING!

FIND THAT SLAMMER, COLONEL! CAPTURE HIM IF YOU CAN; KILL HIM IF YOU MUST! CLICK!

OLD PHAISTOS SOUNDED PRETTY **PEEVED.** SO HOW COME HE NEVER BUSTS **YOU,** COLONEL? HE BUSTS EVERYBODY ELSE.

I DIDN'T HEAR THAT, PRIVATE STARK.

LIEUTENANT ACKER, TAKE YOUR PLATOON, DOUBLE THE GUARDS ON THE LIFEPOD BAYS.

YESSIR!

SERGEANT KALI, YOU AND PRIVATE STARK STAY HERE.

LET'S GO, GUYS! SHOW SOME HUSTLE!

THE FEWER WHO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, THE BETTER. PUT THESE ON.

BUT... **THOSE** ARE--

NOT ANOTHER WORD, SERGEANT.

ALL SET? GOOD. AND YOU'RE RIGHT, SERGEANT. THEY'RE **BRAIN BLOCKERS.**

I'VE NEVER EVEN **SEEN** ONE BEFORE.

YOU MEAN... SO A TELEPATH LIKE VIDIOT CAN'T PICK UP OUR THOUGHTS.

THAT'S RIGHT. I'LL EXPLAIN IN A MINUTE!

BUT FIRST, I WANT TO CONSIDER OUR SLAMMER.

I THINK THE KEY IS VIDIOT.

THAT'S BECAUSE THEY ARE **HIGHLY** ILLEGAL!

I ONLY HAVE TWO.

TELEPATHS DON'T ALWAYS RECEIVE **LITERAL** CUES THAT MAKE SENSE.

I QUESTIONED HIM WHEN I TOOK HIM DOWN TO THE INFIRMARY.

HE'S QUITE SURE HE SAW TEETH, HUMAN-LOOKING BUT MORE ROBUST WITH ENLARGED CANINES. SUGGEST ANYTHING?

SOME SORT OF **PRIMATE?**

THERE **ARE** STORIES OF SLAMMERS WHO'VE HAD THEIR BRAINS... **AUGMENTED.**

CUT INTO THIN SLICES AND INTER-LEAVED WITH WAFERS OF SOME SORT OF ANTHROPOID WETWEAR.

BUT WHY?

NO ONE KNOWS FOR CERTAIN, BUT IT'S THOUGHT THAT THE ADDITIONAL WETWEAR IS CONDITIONED AND PROGRAMMED AS AN ORGANIC COMPUTER...

...ENABLING CERTAIN SLAMMERS TO NAVIGATE HYPERSPACE **MANU-ALLY!** WITHOUT COM-PUTERS, NAVIGATIONAL AIDS, CHARTS, OR ANYTHING ELSE.

A USEFUL **FAILSAFE** ON A DISABLED WARSHIP.

THERE CAN'T **BE** MANY. JUST OUR BAD LUCK TO CATCH ONE THIS TIME. IF WE DID.

NATURALLY, SUCH A PRO-CEDURE ISN'T CHEAP.

SO SOME ADDITIONAL PRO-GRAMMING GOES INTO THE MIX.

PROTECTIVE-TYPE PRO-GRAMMING?

I DON'T GET IT. SLAMMERS ARE TOUGH, FAST, HARD. WHAT'S TO PROGRAM?

INSTANTANEOUS REACTION TIMES.

AUTOMATIC LETHAL RESPONSES TO LETHAL SITUATIONS. UNDER ANY CONDITIONS.

VIDIOT'S READING SUGGESTS THAT THE SLAMMER WAS GALVANIZED THE **MOMENT** HE WAS ABOUT TO BE TERMINATED.

SHACKLES, DRUGS, TELEPATHIC SHUT-DOWN... **NONE** OF IT MADE ANY DIFFERENCE WHEN IT CAME TO THE CRUNCH.

IT'S GOING TO MAKE HIM **VERY** DIFFICULT TO KILL.

AND **THIS** IS THE GUY THAT'S LOOSE ON THE SHIP?

GEEZUS!

HE'S NOT OUR **ONLY** PROBLEM.

SWELL. THRILL ME.

I DIDN'T TELL THE EMPEROR, BUT THE EMPTY CONDITION OF TILTON'S MIND SO SOON AFTER DEATH, THE STATIC VIDIOT ENCOUNTERED IN THE ASSASSIN'S MIND...

...BOTH LEAD TO ONE INESCAPABLE CONCLUSION.

THEY WERE **WIPED.**

THAT MEANS THERE'S A **TELEPATHOGEN** ABOARD SHIP.

AND HE'S WORKING FOR THE OTHER SIDE.

THAT'S THE REASON FOR THE BRAIN BLOCKERS.

COLONEL PHAEDRA ...A PRIVATE MESSAGE, SHIP MAIL.

GO AHEAD.

WOULD LIKE TO BUY YOU A DRINK AND APOLOGIZE. MAY BE ABLE TO HELP WITH YOUR PROBLEM. I'M IN THE BAR NOW.

MESSAGE ENDS.

"I DON'T **BELIEVE** IT! THE **NERVE** OF THAT GUY! AND WHAT THE HELL DOES **HE** KNOW ABOUT THIS?"

"LET'S FIND OUT, PRIVATE. WE'LL PICK UP VIDIOT ON THE WAY. IF THERE IS A **TP** ABOARD, RENSSELEAR'S DUCK SOUP, ESPECIALLY IF HE'S REALLY BECOME A DEAD-HEAD."

"BESIDES, WE COULD ALL USE A DRINK, RIGHT?"

OHHHH, MY HEAD. BARTENDER. ANOTHER DOUBLE.

HI, CUTIE.

WOULD YOU PLEASE KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN? I'VE GOT A SPLITTING--!

OH NOOO OO!

NOW, IS THAT ANY WAY TO GREET YOUR DREAM DATE?

I STILL THINK THE COLONEL SHOULD HAVE LET ME PUSH HIS FACE IN.

YOU WATCH TOO MANY WESTERNS, PRIVATE.

YOU CAN'T GO OUT AND SHOOT **EVERY** PROBLEM. NOT IF YOU WANT TO BE AN OFFICER.

WOW! YOU LIKE **WESTERNS,** PRIVATE STARK?

ME, TOO! DID YOU SEE "SUNRISE ON THE SAGE"?

LOVE 'EM, KID. ESPECIALLY THE GUN-FIGHTS AT HIGH NOON.

YOU'RE **BOTH** IDIOTS.

DRINKS, GENTLE-MEN?

ROTGUT. WHAT-EVER.

GENTIAN ALE, SARGE?

I WANT BEER.

GIVE THE KID A COKE.

HEY!

YOU DID **GOOD,** KID. I THINK EVEN THE COLONEL WAS IMPRESSED.

I'M SORRY YOU LOST YOUR STUFF.

A **DEADHEAD!** I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!

YOU CAN'T READ **ANYTHING** ANYMORE?

ONLY A LITTLE FUZZ.

THAT OLD GUY.

THE DRUNK.

THE COLONEL'S BLANK, BUT I COULDN'T READ HER BEFORE.

THAT BARFLY.

THE WOMAN.

THE DANCER.

THE BARTEND--

THAT'S FUNNY. NOTHING.

...EXCEPT, OF COURSE, FOR THE SLAMMER AFTER HE WOKE UP.

THE COLONEL'S THE ONLY ONE I COULON'T READ...

HEY! YOU DON'T SUPPOSE-- MMMPFFFF!!!

PRIVATE STARK? GET THE COLONEL.

COLONEL? SERGEANT KALI WOULD LIKE A WORD.

CAN I TOAST THIS GUY?

NO. HE DOESN'T HAVE A CLUE. FORGET HIM.

OHHHH. MY HEAD.

WHAT IS IT, SERGEANT?

MMMMPH!

THIS IS PHAEDRA.

ALL BULLS, **FULLY LOADED**, TO ANGEL'S DIVE, LEVEL 29! **WARP SPEED!**

THE TIGERS WERE **CHEATED** OUT OF THE LAST GAME.

IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR THAT LOUSY CALL IN THE FIFTH PERIOD, THEY'D STILL BE CHAMPS.

NO **WAY.** USE OF ILLEGAL AMMO IS ALWAYS GROUNDS FOR...

NATURALLY, I WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO INVEST EVERY-THING MERELY ON MY SAY-SO, BUT MY COUSIN...

SHE'S THE CRYSTAL DIVINATOR ON LEVEL 19. SHE'S GOT THE **BIGGEST** PAIR OF...

ONE WORD, GULLET. PLASTICS, AND SUB-NUCLEAR **GENETICS,** OF COURSE!

WITH THIS REAL ESTATE DEAL, MAN, I'M TELLING YOU IT'S THE CHANCE OF A **LIFETIME!**

AFTER LAST NIGHT, I DON'T THINK SHE'LL EVER TALK TO ME AGAIN...

squeek squeek

KKR ASH!

COLONEL! WHAT'S--?

ZZIP!

THE **BARTENDER!**

TAKE HIM!

UH OH!

LAST CALL!

THIS ONE'S ON THE HOUSE!

FTSSS

THE BAR IS CLOSED!

COLONEL! DUCK!

K'KIKK!

GRABB!

FWHOOO

HOLD THAT LIFT!

TOO LATE, IT'S ALREADY--

HEY! IS THAT A GUN?

NO! I'M JUST GLAD TO SEE YOU!

SCHR RIPP!

THUMP!

bhlam! bhlam! bhlam!

JEEZUS!

LEVEL 93, PLEASE!

PERFECT! THANKS!

BHLAMM!

KRAAK!

FTSSSK!

WHAT ...WAS THAT?

I DUNNO, BUT I THINK HE JUST WIPED OUT THE SHIP'S AFT **ENERGY** GRID!

POWER OUTAGE REPORTED, LEVELS 41 TO 54.

ALL LIFTS DEACTIVATED.

BACKUP MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY DISABLED!

EMERGENCY LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEMS OPERATIONAL.

RESCUE TEAMS TO LEVEL 46.

BLAST IT!

SKIM-CYCLES! QUICKLY!

WE'VE **GOT** TO CUT HIM OFF!

THIS IS COLONEL PHAEDRA!

DEACTIVATE AND **LOCK** ALL LIFEPOD BAY SYSTEMS!

GUN IT, PRIVATE STARK!

YESSIR! AND DON'T WORRY, SIR!

I'M GONNA KILL THAT GUY ***MYSELF!***

ONLY IF WE HAVE TO, PRIVATE.

ENTERING LEVEL 53, SIR!

APPROACHING LIFEPOD BAY, SIR!

THERE HE IS!

HE'S HEADING INTO THE BAY!

NAIL HIM!

KAPOW!

KAPOW!

KAPOW!

WAIT! DON'T SHOOT! DON'T SHOOT!

KARWHOOOSH!!

KERASH!

TINKLE! TINKLE!

BOUNCE! BOUNCE! BOUNCE!

THUNK!

PTING!

OH, MAN! WHO TURNED OUT THE LIGHTS?

I DON'T **BELIEVE** IT! HE BLEW UP THE CORRIDOR!

THE POD-BAY DOOR'S BLOCKED!

COLONEL! ARE YOU OKAY?

I'M FINE.

GIVE ME FIVE MINUTES TO CRAWL THROUGH THE WRECKAGE.

THEN START CLEARING IT AWAY. I SHOULD BE THROUGH BY THEN.

SIR! LET **ME** COME, TOO!

YOU'RE TOO BIG, PRIVATE STARK!

ANY MOVEMENT AND THIS WHOLE THING MAY COLLAPSE.

REMEMBER. **FIVE** MINUTES.

IF ONLY I HADN'T JUMPED THE GUN!

ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HER, I'LL NEVER FORGIVE MYSELF!

AT LAST I CAN DUMP THE FALSE FACE.

AND JUST IN TIME. THIS THING IS **SUFFOCATING** ME.

SYSTEM'S SHUT DOWN. NO SURPRISE THERE.

INTERESTING. THIS STUFF LOOKS LIKE ANCIENT MILITARY HARDWARE.

BUT THESE OLD BOARDS ARE EASY.

SHOULDN'T TAKE MORE THAN A COUPLE OF MINUTES TO BYPASS THE CIRCUITS MANUALLY!

CLIKK!

GOT IT.

Hmm

ANOTHER THIRTY SECONDS AND I'LL--

?

KPOW!

BLHAM! BLAHM!

KLIKK KLIKK!

PWANNG!

OHH!

INCREDIBLE!

NOBODY COULD HAVE AVOIDED THAT SHOT!

IT'S MY LEAD ALLERGY.

WE'RE NOT TAKING **PRISONERS** ANYMORE?

YOU'RE TOO **DANGEROUS.**

THANK YOU. AREN'T YOU TOO **SHORT** FOR MILITARY SERVICE?

I AM COLONEL PHAEDRA OF TEAM NOVA. AND I HAVE **SPECIAL** QUALIFICATIONS.

WHO ARE **YOU**?

I AM CALLED ROJAS.

COMMANDER ROJAS?

THE **AUTHOR**?

I'VE READ **ALL** YOUR WORK. YOU'RE A **BRILLIANT** MILITARY STRATEGIST!

I'VE WRITTEN AN OCCASIONAL VOLUME. I'M SURPRISED ANY OF THEM HAVE GOTTEN OUT THIS FAR.

AND JUST LOOK WHERE IT'S GOTTEN ME.

WHY HAVEN'T YOU KILLED ME?

I HAVEN'T KILLED **ANYONE** ABOARD THIS SHIP. EXCEPT FOR THE ASSASSIN.

NO POINT IN RILING FOLKS WHILE I'M TRYING TO LEAVE.

I'LL HAVE TO TAKE YOU DOWN IF I CAN.

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D SETTLE FOR AN AUTO-GRAPH?

DIDN'T THINK SO.

THUNK!

WE'VE CLEARED THE AIRLOCK!

WE'RE IN!

AND ON TARGET! WE'VE FOUND THE SLAMMER!

LOOK! IT'S COLONEL PHAEDRA!

INSTRUCTIONS?

KILL THEM BOTH!

6-8-94

NEXT ISSUE - THE INVADERS

IN WHICH THE DEVIL COMES CALLING AND STAYS FOR DINNER!

IT WAS THREE VERY LARGE GUYS IN HARDENED SPACE **ARMOR**...

HEY!

...AGAINST A FOUR-FOOT-TALL **COLONEL** FROM TEAM NOVA...

...AND AN UNARMED **STAR SLAMMER.**

NAB!

HEY!!!

FLIP!

THOMP!

FRAKK

GEEZUS!

KILL HIM!

KATHOOM!

KATHOOM!

FROOM! FROOM!

FRAKK!

FRAKK!

KERASH!

the minoan agendas

BLUHANG!

chapter three:

THE INVADERS!

KERASH!

IT WASN'T EVEN CLOSE.

SNAPPT!

FRRRWHIT!

COMMANDER! DUCK!

PHWIT!

FRAT

SHHRING!

THROUGH

GIKKK!

ROAD

THAT WAS WELL DONE.

BUT I DID SAVE **YOUR** LIFE FIRST.

HOW ABOUT TURNING AROUND WHILE I EJECT IN A LIFE-POD?

NO. FOR THREE REASONS.

FIRST, I'D HAVE FAILED IN MY DUTY AND THE EMPEROR WOULD SKIN ME **ALIVE.**

SECOND, IT WOULDN'T GIVE ME A CHANCE TO EVEN THE SCORE.

AND THIRD ?

THOSE CLOWNS DESTROYED THE EJECT MECHANISM WHEN THEY BLEW THEIR WAY IN HERE. YOU'RE GOING **NOWHERE.**

COLONEL PHAEDRA! **COLONEL PHAEDRA!**

WHAT **IS** IT, LIEUTENANT ACKER?

SHIP'S BEING **ATTACKED,** SIR! MULTIPLE ENTRY SITES.

SMALL GROUPS OF HIGHLY-TRAINED **COMMANDOS** ARE ALL **OVER** US! WE'RE **TRYING** TO HOLD 'EM, BUT WE **--SQUACCCKK!**

ACKER! **ACKER!**

KALI! THIS IS **PHAEDRA!** YOU AND **STARK** GET YOUR MEN TO THE **BRIDGE** AND **HOLD** IT!

AND WHY **SHOULD** I?

BECAUSE THE NEAREST LIFEPOD BAY IS ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE COMMUNICATIONS CORE!

GOOD REASON.

THE MEREDITH'S UNDER **ATTACK!**

WE'RE **THERE,** SIR!

GRAB ONE OF THOSE CRACKERJACKS AND START BURNING THROUGH THE WALL OF DEBRIS, COMMANDER! WE'VE GOT TO GET **OUT** OF HERE!

SCRAAAPE!

AND A FEW MINUTES LATER...

WE'RE THROUGH! COME ON!

COLONEL--

COMMANDER, YOU CAN COME WITH ME OR WE'LL HAVE IT OUT RIGHT **NOW!**

THEY'RE KILLING MY **BOYS!**

I NEVER ARGUE WITH A LADY. ESPECIALLY WHEN SHE'S ARMED.

THIRTEEN LEVELS AND FOUR TURBO-LIFTS LATER...

TOO **LATE!**

WHO-EVER THEY ARE, THEY KNOW THEIR BUSINESS.

I THINK THAT'S ONE OF YOURS OVER THERE, COLONEL.

LOOKS LIKE HE TOOK A COUPLE OF THE BAD GUYS WITH HIM.

HE WOULD HAVE.

CORPORAL THRAAX WAS... GOOD.

THIS IS **STYGIAN** ARMOR. GOOD QUALITY BUT VERY OLD. **THAT'S** WHY YOU AND I ARE STILL ALIVE.

IS **MY** SUIT ABOARD THIS SHIP?

WE'RE NOT **THAT** STUPID. IT'S BEING SENT BY SEPARATE CARRIER.

TOO BAD.

IF WE RUN INTO MORE OF THESE GUYS--!

LISTEN!

SOME-BODY'S COMING! **FAST!**

BEHIND THE BULKHEAD!

KATHAM!

SMART! THEY CAME RIGHT **THROUGH** IT!

ALL RIGHT! DROP YOUR WEAPONS!

WAITA MINUTE! DON'T ANYBODY **SHOOT!**

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COLONEL PHAEDRA! THANK GOD YOU'RE ALIVE!

I MEAN... IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, SIR. WE WERE WORRIED.

ME, TOO, PRIVATE STARK. REPORT.

CAN WE GO HOME NOW?

WE DIDN'T GET AS FAR AS THE BRIDGE, SIR. A SQUAD IN BATTLE ARMOR CAUGHT US BY SURPRISE.

MOST OF OUR MEN WERE CUT DOWN INSTANTLY.

THE SERGEANT AND I ESCAPED. WE GOT TO VIDIOT JUST AS TWO CREEPS WERE ABOUT TO WASTE HIM.

WE'VE BEEN SECOND-GUESSED RIGHT DOWN THE LINE, SIR.

IT'S A WONDER STARK AND I MADE IT **THIS** FAR.

MAYBE. MAYBE NOT.

A QUESTION, COLONEL. HOW DID YOU FIGURE OUT THAT THE BARTENDER WAS THE FORMER PRISONER?

DUMB LUCK. WE WERE CHECKING OUT A SUSPICIOUS MESSAGE FROM A GUY IN THE BAR.

TURNED OUT HE DIDN'T EVEN REMEMBER **SENDING** IT BUT... UMMMM.

SOMETHING?

SOMETHING I SHOULD HAVE REMEMBERED. I SUSPECTED EARLIER THAT WE MIGHT HAVE A **TELEPATHOGEN** ABOARD.

THAT'S **RIGHT.** AN **ENEMY** TP.

IF THAT'S TRUE, **HE** PROBABLY **KNEW** THAT THE BARTENDER WAS THE SLAMMER!

HE COULD HAVE **MADE** THE BARFLY SEND THAT MESSAGE!

THE BARFLY'S HEADACHE WASN'T A **HANGOVER!** HE'D BEEN **BRAINWALKED** TO GET US TO THE BAR TO FIND... AND **KILL**... THE ESCAPED PRISONER!

THE TP KNEW NO SLAMMER'D **LET** HIMSELF BE TAKEN **ALIVE.**

THE ORIGINAL BARTENDER WAS AN **ASSASSIN** IN DISGUISE. I FOUND HIS STUFF...

...AND TRADED PLACES WITH HIM.

HOW DID YOU --?

SAY, WHO IS THIS, ANY-WAY?

OH, **NO!** IT'S **HIM!**

AH **HA!** THE LITTLE **GAMES-PLAYER!**

HIM WHO, KID? KEE-RIST! IT'S THE **SLAMMER!**

THE NAME'S ROJAS!

I'LL BET THESE KILLERS ARE SLAMMERS TRYING TO **RESCUE** THIS GUY!

WE OUGHT TO WASTE HIM RIGHT **NOW!**

EASE OFF, PRIVATE. "THESE KILLERS" TRIED TO KILL **HIM.** ALLIES OF THE TELE-PATHOGEN **AND** THE ASSASSIN, MOST LIKELY.

THEY TRIED TO KILL **ME,** TOO. HE PROBABLY SAVED MY LIFE.

YEAH, BUT HOW DO YOU **KNOW** THAT? MAYBE IT'S ALL A SET-UP! EVERYBODY KNOWS SLAMMERS'RE THE MOST DEVIOUS **KILLERS** IN THE **UNIVERSE!**

SURELY, WE'RE NOT MORE DEVIOUS THAN THE MOMRATH GRAVES OF BRILLIG 7?

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YEAH? WELL, MISTER SMART GUY, MAYBE YOU SNOWED THE COLONEL, BUT I THINK WE'VE JUST ABOUT--

GRIPP!

HEY!

UGGGGH!

I THINK WE'VE JUST ABOUT COME TO THE END OF ANY **USEFUL** DISCUSSION, DON'T YOU?

COLONEL, IF YOU'LL EXAMINE THE HELMET OF ONE OF THE DEAD COMMANDOS ...?

I THINK YOU'LL FIND SOMETHING REVEALING.

FREEDOM!

I DON'T NEED MY HONOR DEFENDED, PRIVATE STARK. IT HASN'T BEEN TAMPERED WITH.

NO, SIR.

AND **IF** YOU TWO GORILLAS HAVE QUITE FINISHED BEATING YOUR CHESTS...?

AS AN **ARMOR** EXPERT, PRIVATE. WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF THIS?

13

LOUSY LITTLE BACKSTABBING--!

WHAT WAS THAT, PRIVATE?

NOTHING, SIR. THAT'S WEIRD. THERE'S NO **COMMUNICATOR** OF ANY KIND.

BUT WHO WEARS BATTLE ARMOR WITHOUT COMMUNICATORS?

IT'S **NOT** JUST **A** TELEPATHOGEN! IT'S **TELEPATHS!** A **LOT** OF THEM!

SKY!

WASN'T **SKY** THE NAME OF THE VILLAGE WE **DESTROYED,** COLONEL?

YES. IT WAS THE CORE SETTLEMENT FOR THE EMPIRE'S TELEPATH CLAN.

I SAW THAT BOTH THE SERGEANT AND PRIVATE WERE WEARING BRAIN-BLOCKERS WHEN THEY ARRIVED.

AND THEY'RE THE **ONLY** TWO OF YOUR COMMAND WHO ESCAPED.

I SUSPECTED SOMETHING MORE THAN **COINCIDENCE** WHEN YOU FOUND ME SO QUICKLY. TELEPATHS **HAD** OCCURRED TO ME.

THIS DOESN'T MAKE **SENSE.**

THE EMPEROR WOULDN'T GRIEVE TO SEE SKY **DESTROYED,** BUT IF HE **HAD** HIRED THE STAR SLAMMERS, I'D HAVE **KNOWN** ABOUT IT.

BESIDES, WHEN WORD GOT OUT, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN POLITICAL **SUICIDE.**

MAYBE IT'S AN **ASSISTED** SUICIDE.

GEEZUS!

THERE'S AN AUXILIARY COMMUNICATIONS LINK THAT THE SKYES MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT.

ROJAS?

ACCEPT MY PAROLE. IF THE **EMPIRE** DIDN'T HIRE US, I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHO **DID.** LET'S ROCK 'N' ROLL!

MEANWHILE, ON THE BRIDGE OF THE MEREDITH...

SOFTWARE SECURITY SYSTEMS BREACHED, ALL SHIPBOARD COMPUTERS ON LINE.

COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK HAS BEEN FULLY REINTE-GRATED UNDER OUR CONTROL.

SHIP STATUS ?

PASSENGER DECK SEALED. CREW HAS BEEN SEQUESTERED IN THE FORWARD STORAGE CHAMBERS.

TEAM NOVA'S BULLS HAVE BEEN NEUTRALIZED.

ALL OF THEM?

UH... NEARLY. WE HAVE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS OF A COUPLE OF BULLS STILL LOOSE. THEY... MAY HAVE BEEN **UNACCES-SIBLE.**

COMMANDER PHAEDRA HAS ALSO NOT BEEN RELOCATED.

AND THE STAR SLAMMER ?

UN-ACCOUNTED FOR.

HE MUST BE **TERMINATED!** ... AND **SOON!**

BEGIN SCANNING THE SHIP'S ENTIRE COMPANY! SOME-BODY **SOME-WHERE** HAS SEEN THESE PEOPLE! **ACCESS** THEM!

THAT WILL TELL US WHERE TO FIND THEM!

INITIATE DESTRUCTION OF ALL LIFEPOD EJECTION SYSTEMS.

NO ONE MUST BE PERMITTED TO ESCAPE.

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COMMUNI-CATIONS UP AND RUNNING, SIR. I'VE GOT **NETWORK HOLOCAST** ON LINE!

THE FIRST OF OUR FEEDS IS COMING THROUGH!

AS REPORTED EARLIER, A DESPERATE ACT OF UNPARALLELED TERRORISM OCCURRED A FEW DAYS AGO ON THE FRINGES OF THE MINOAN EMPIRE.

WE ARE ONLY NOW RECEIVING THE FIRST HOLO-IMAGES OF THE AGONIZING DEATH OF THIS RE-MOTE AND PASTORAL COMMUNITY.

LOOK AND **WITNESS** FOR YOURSELVES THE DEATHS OF THESE HELPLESS, **INNOCENT** PEOPLE!

AND I ASK YOU, THE ORDINARY CITIZENS OF OUR **OUTER** SYSTEMS, THE MUCH-MALIGNED **SPORADES**...

...WHERE IS THE **EMPEROR?** WHERE ARE HIS **TROOPS** WHO PROTECT HIS CITIZENS?

HAS THE EMPEROR TURNED HIS **BACK** ON THE SPORADES TO LET THEM DIE LIKE **DOGS** WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT?

IS THIS **TRULY** THE **MINOAN** WAY?

PERFECT!

SIR! WE'VE FOUND THE **ASSASSIN'S** BODY IN CRYO-SUSPENSION.

LOOKS AS THOUGH THEY WERE WAITING TO EXAMINE HIM TILL THEY GOT HOME.

IMPLANTED FIBER OPTICS AND DIGITAL CARTRIDGES WERE INTACT.

AND...?

THEY FUNCTION **PERFECTLY.** WE'VE GOT THE SLAMMER'S LIKENESS BEFORE HE KILLED THE ASSASSIN.

EXCELLENT. PHAEDRA'S MESSAGE TO THE EMPEROR DETAIL-ING THE SLAMMER'S ESCAPE IS GOING TO SAVE US SOME TIME AND TROUBLE.

START FEEDING THE IMAGES INTO THE **BLENDER** AND GET TO WORK.

AT ONCE!

AND AT THAT MOMENT, SOMEWHERE BELOW THE BRIDGE IN THE PASSENGER DECKS...

I CAN'T **BELIEVE** IT!

A CRUMMY **FUGITIVE** ON MY OWN **SHIP!**

THAT LOUSY COLONEL **PHAEDRA!** IF SHE HADN'T ORDERED THE MEREDITH UNDER MARTIAL LAW AND TAKEN COMMAND, **NONE** OF THIS WOULD HAVE HAPPENED!

NOBODY WOULD'VE CAUGHT **ME** BY SURPRISE IF I'D BEEN-- **WHO'S** THERE?

O...DODON'T MOVE! I'VE GGOT YOU C... CCOVERED!

OHHHHH!

CAPTAIN SALARDO! THANK GOD IT'S **YOU!** I WAS SO FRIGHTENED! THEY HAVEN'T CAUGHT ME, EITHER!

I WAS WORRIED YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN ONE OF THOSE **HORRIBLE** THINGS IN ARMOR!

I... I BEG YOUR PARDON?

OH, SURELY YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN ALREADY, **CYRENE DEMILO?**

YOU INVITED ME TO DINE AT THE CAPTAIN'S TABLE THE FIRST NIGHT OUT?

WELL...

OH! **OH!** OF COURSE! MS. **DEMILO!**

MY APOLOGIES. IT'S JUST THAT THINGS HAVE BEEN SO... **CONFUSED!**

I KNOW! I **KNOW!** BUT WE SHOULDN'T TALK HERE!

MORE OF THOSE AWFUL MEN MIGHT COME ALONG AT ANY **MOMENT!**

WOULD YOU ESCORT ME BACK TO MY CABIN BEFORE WE'RE CAUGHT HERE IN THE OPEN?

OH, **THANK** YOU, CAPTAIN! I JUST **KNEW** YOU WERE A MAN A WOMAN COULD **DEPEND** ON!

WE'RE IN LUCK. SO FAR, EVERYTHING SEEMS QUIET.

THEN WE'RE **SAFE. THIS** IS MY CABIN.

GOOD! GOOD! GLAD TO BE OF SERVICE!

WON'T YOU... COME IN? I'D LIKE TO **REALLY** THANK YOU FOR SAVING ME.

WE COULD EVEN HIDE HERE **...TOGETHER.**

HUMPFF! SHOULDN'T, REALLY! FRATERNIZING WITH THE PASSENGERS AND ALL THAT! **PROHIBITED,** YOU KNOW!

I WON'T TELL! AND BESIDES, THERE'S **NOTHING** FRATERNAL ABOUT WHAT **I** HAVE IN MIND.

HMMMM MMMMM?

CKKLIKKK!

19

CLATTER CLATTER CLATTER CLATTER

AUXILARY COMMUNICATIONS LINK IS JUST AHEAD.

IT'S STILL TWO LEVELS **BELOW** US, ISN'T IT?

HOW DID YOU KNOW **THAT,** COMMANDER?

LUCKY GUESS.

RIGHT! AND I'M A MONKEY'S UNCLE.

HEY! SPACE BULLS!

UH OH!

PAOUM!

SPRTTCKKT!

KEE-RIIST! WHAT A BUSINESS!

WHAT'S UP, SERGEANT?

LOOSE END.

IF WE'RE LUCKY, I TOOK CARE OF IT IN TIME!

WE HAVE A FLASH **ACCESS!** LEVEL 22, HEADING THROUGH CORRIDOR E-19!

SQUADS THREE AND SEVEN MOVE TO INTER-CEPT.

LEAVE **NO** SURVIVORS!

I DON'T LIKE IT, COLONEL. SOMETHING SMELLS **WRONG!**

GET EVERY-BODY BACK IN THE SHAFT!

TOO LATE!

THIS SLO-SHAFT WILL CARRY US DOWN TO THE ACCESS TUBE.

WE SHOULD BE RIGHT ABOVE THE COMLINK!

ARE YOU SURE THE SKYES AREN'T JUST TRYING TO KILL YOUR BUDDY HERE FOR **REVENGE?**

NO. IT'S TOO SOON. TOO **ORGANIZED.** WHATEVER'S HAPPENING HERE, IT'S BEEN CAREFULLY PLANNED.

HIT THE DECK!

THAM! THAM!

BTHUM-

STAY BEHIND ME, KID! THERE'S A COUPLE **DOZEN** OF 'EM!

THUMP! THUMP! THUMP!

THEY'VE GOT US PINNED DOWN!

AND THAT IS **THAT!**

THEY'RE TRAPPED IN A CUL-DE-SAC, SIR. ALL OF THEM.

WELL DONE.

HEY, LOOK! IT'S **SONG-BIRD!**

YEAH! AND IT LOOKS LIKE SHE GOT HER **MAN!**

NOW, BOYS, SHOW A LITTLE MORE RESPECT FOR YOUR **ELDERS.**

THIS IS **CAPTAIN** SALARDO, COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE MEREDITH.

HE'S **MADLY** IN LOVE WITH ME. AREN'T YOU, DARLING?

YOU **KNOW** I AM, MY DEAREST.

IN FACT...

...I DOUBT IF HE CAN EVEN **SEE** ANYONE ELSE AT THIS POINT...

...EXCEPT ME. **MODIFIED,** OF COURSE.

SO WHAT AVATAR ARE YOU USING **THIS** TIME?

CYRENE. SHE'S A **WONDERFUL** ATTENTION-GETTER.

AND THE GOOD CAPTAIN IS BASICALLY A **SIMPLE** MAN. WITH SIMPLE DESIRES.

AND WHAT HE DESIRES ...IS **ME.**

WHICH IS WHY HE'LL DO **ANYTHING** I ASK.

"INCLUDING FLYING THIS MARVELOUSLY BAROQUE STARSHIP RIGHT DOWN INTO THE **HEART** OF THE **EMPIRE.**

"AT .9 LIGHTSPEED!

"AND YOU **WILL** DO IT, WON'T YOU DARLING? FOR **ME?**"

"ABSOLUTELY, MY DEAREST. NOW?"

"NOW, CAPTAIN."

NEXT ISSUE:
THE SHIP

THE SHIP

the MINOAN AGENDAS

chapter FOUR:

WE'VE GOT THEM TRAPPED IN A DEAD END!

KILL THEM!

PAUM!

PAUM!

PAUM!

WOW! I THINK WE'VE WORN OUT OUR WELCOME!

KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, VIDIOT!

WHY BOTHER? WE'RE HISTORY!

ANYTHING IN YOUR BOOKS ABOUT THIS, COMMANDER ROJAS?

KRUMPH!

MAYBE NOT. BUT I ALWAYS HOLD SOMETHING BACK FOR THE NEXT VOLUME! TURN YOUR BOYS AROUND, COLONEL.

WHAT?

NOW, COLONEL PHAEDRA! WE'RE ALMOST OUT OF TIME AND I'M NOT GIVING AWAY **ALL** MY SECRETS!

WHAT BOOKS?

KALI! STARK! BACK OFF! AND KEEP VIDIOT WITH YOU!

GOOD. NOW, YOU AND YOUR BOYS STAY ON YOUR **TOES!**

RRRRR RRRRRR RROAR!

ALL RIGHT, **SOJAR!** TIME TO COME OUT AND **PLAY!**

RIP

GEEZUS! HOW DID HE DO THAT?

YOU DON'T WANT TO **KNOW,** PRIVATE.

THE GUY JUST TORE A **HOLE** RIGHT THROUGH THE ROOF!

I'M NOT SURE IT **WAS** ROJAS, EXACTLY.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN AND WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT **BOOKS?**

COMMANDER ROJAS IS AN AUTHOR ON STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL WARFARE.

JUST GET READY. I THINK ALL **HELL'S** ABOUT TO BREAK LOOSE.

KEEP FIRING! I WANT THAT CORRIDOR REDUCED TO **SLAG!**

RRRRRR ROARRR!

RIP PP!

HEY!

PAUM

PAUM

PAUM!

ARRRRRRRRR RRRRRRRR GGGGGGGG GGGGGHHH!

LOOK OUT!

WHAT THE--?

KILL IT! KILL IT!

BRO...THER! SOME TACTICS!

STARK! WATCH VIDIOT! KALI! LET'S GO!

AW, COLONEL!

ARRRRRR RRRGGGGH HHHHHHHH!

AIEEEE!

NAIL THAT ONE, KALI! HE'S MAKING A **BREAK** FOR IT!

THOMM!

HE'S MINE!

THOMM!

BHANG!

UGG!

I'LL GET YOU ANYWAY, BITCH!

OHHHH!

COLONEL!

COLONEL!

THOMM!

COLONEL!

THOMM!

KRASH!

COLONEL!

THUM!

BASH!

THUM!

THUD!

THUM!

ARRRCH!

THAT WAS VERY IMPRESSIVE, PRIVATE.

COMMANDER ROJAS... SIR! HOW THE HECK DID YOU DO THAT?

TRADE SECRET, SERGEANT KALI. JUST THINK OF IT AS MY DANGEROUS HALF.

THEN... COLONEL PHAEDRA WAS RIGHT?

THE GOOD COLONEL WAS DISCREET ENOUGH NOT TO INQUIRE FURTHER.

COLONEL! ARE YOU...?

I'M... FINE, PRIVATE. WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

DID YOU DISOBEY ORDERS?

NOSSIR! THE KID WAS WITH ME THE WHOLE TIME.

HEY, DID YOU SEE THE DEAD GUY IN THE GOLD ARMOR? DEFINITELY A SKY!

YEAH. THE REST OF 'EM ARE JUST STANDARD CLONE-DROIDS. SEVENTH APPROXI-MATION. LIKE ALL THE OTHERS.

WE HAVE TO REACH THE AUXILIARY COM CENTER. THERE'S JUST A CHANCE THE SKYES HAVEN'T DESTROYED IT.

THE EMPEROR MUST BE WARNED!

I'LL TAKE ROJAS AND LEVEL 19.

YOU BOYS TAKE VIDIOT AND LEVEL 24.

THAT SHOULD DOUBLE OUR CHANCES. WE CAN'T MATCH THEM FOR POWER. WE'VE GOT TO RELY ON STEALTH.

BUT SIR ...?

I'LL BE FINE, PRIVATE STARK.

GET GOING!

SQUAD FIVE HAS REACHED THE CUL-DE-SAC. OUR GUYS ARE **DEAD.** TARGETS HAVE **ESCAPED.**

CURSE THE FOOLS!

CAN WE STEP UP THE **TIMETABLE?** SHIFT TO **WARP** DRIVE?

THIS TUB IS TOO OLD AND THE SOFT-WARE'S **STONE-AGE** NAVIGATION COULDN'T GUARANTEE HITTING THE TARGET AT FASTER-THAN-LIGHT SPEED.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

THERE'RE ONLY A FEW OF 'EM LOOSE!

YOU DON'T UNDER-STAND.

DURING THE ATTACK ON SKY, WE CAME UP AGAINST SOME SORT OF MENTAL **INTERFERENCE** WE'VE NEVER ENCOUNTERED BEFORE.

WE COULDN'T CONTAIN OR TOTALLY DEFLECT THE ATTACK AS WE'D ORIGINALLY PLANNED.

AND A FEW HOURS AGO, I FELT THE SAME SORT OF INTERFER-ENCE **HERE** FOR A MOMENT.

IT **HAS** TO BE THE SLAMMER. I DON'T KNOW **WHAT** IT MEANS, BUT IT WORRIES ME...

...AND THE SOONER WE FINISH HIM, THE **BETTER.**

THE SAME WITH COLONEL PHAEDRA. SHE'S TOO **DANGEROUS.**

BUT THINGS **ARE** GOING WELL, SONGBIRD.

CAPTAIN SALAROO, UNDER THE MENTAL INFLUENCE OF YOUR CYRENE CREATION, IS GUIDING THE MEREDITH BEAUTIFULLY TO ITS RENDEZVOUS WITH DESTINY.

THAT'S TRUE AND WE **STILL** HAVE AN ACE-IN-THE HOLE.

WITH A LITTLE LUCK, OUR DIFFICULTIES WILL SOON BE OVER.

THAT WAS SOME HIT YOU TOOK BACK THERE. AND NOT A SCRATCH.

SOLITON ENERGY SHIELDING IN THE HARNESS?

THAT'S RIGHT.

THAT'S HIGHER-GRADE TECHNOLOGY THAN THE MINOAN EMPIRE USUALLY FIELDS.

I TRAVEL, OKAY? I PICK UP STUFF.

LIKE BRAIN BLOCKERS?

YEAH?

A WISE CHOICE. BUT THAT'S NOT REALLY THE MOST **INTERESTING** THING ABOUT YOU.

THE SKYES OBVIOUSLY CAN'T **ACCESS** YOU.

YOU'RE A **GENETRIX**, ARENT. YOU?

TROMP! TROMP!

TROMP! TROMP! TR

BLAST IT! NOTHING!

THIS CORRIDOR'S A MAJOR NEXUS. I WAS **CERTAIN** THEY'D COME THROUGH HERE.

LIEUTENANT, SEND A SQUAD BACK TO THE LAST INTER-SECTION.

THEY'RE TO KILL **ANYONE** OR **ANYTHING** THAT DOESN'T HAVE PROPER AUTHORIZATION.

YESSIR! YOU FOUR! FALL OUT! MOVE IT!

TROMP! TROMP! TROMP! TROMP!

DIVIDE THE REMAINDER OF THE COMPANY IN HALF. YOUR SECTION TO FOLLOW THE **RIGHT** CORRIDOR. MINE TO FOLLOW THE **LEFT!**

YESSIR! ON THE DOUBLE! LET'S GO!

10

TROMP!
TROMP!
TROMP!
TROMP!
TROMP!
TROMP!
TROMP!

COLONEL... THEY'RE GONE.

SO?

SO MAYBE THIS ISN'T THE TIME OR PLACE?

IT ISN'T. BUT IT WAS STILL FUN.

YOU WERE RIGHT.

COURTESAN, FIRST-CLASS. GENETRONICS, INC.

AND WELL-MADE, TOO. I'LL VOUCH FOR THAT.

BETTER THAN YOU MIGHT **THINK.**

YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH GENETRONICS?

WHO ISN'T? A MULTI-GALACTIC CORPORATION.

YOU **DESIRE.** WE **SUPPLY** HER.

OR HIM.

OR IT.

AND WHAT EMPEROR ZAKROS THE 15TH DESIRED WAS **ME.**

"I WAS BUILT TO **MATCH** HIS SECRET DREAMS.

"BUT HE WAS A RAPACOUS AND GRASPING RULER.

"AND HIS COUNCILORS PERSUADED HIM TO **SHORT-CHANGE** GENETRONICS.

"THEY WERE NOT AMUSED. SO THEY SHORT-CHANGED **HIM!**

"I WAS ONLY FOUR FEET TALL.

"THE EMPEROR WAS **OUT-RAGED.**

"BUT **I** WAS ABLE TO CHANGE HIS MIND.

"FOR A LITTLE WHILE.

"IT WAS A STATE FUNERAL. COURTESANS WEREN'T INVITED.

"STILL, HE DIED **SMILING.**

"AND, WITHIN 24 HOURS, HIS GOOD COUNCILORS...THE **SKYES**...HAD INSTALLED HIS **NEPHEW** AS EMPEROR.

"A **NON**-TELEPATH. A **DEAD-HEAD!** AND THEREBY CONSOLIDATED THEIR HOLD ON THE EMPIRE!

"FOR FUN, THEY MADE ME THE ROYAL **NANNY.**

"WHAT THEY DIDN'T KNOW WAS THAT GENETRONICS HAD **ALREADY** ENJOYED A GOOD LAUGH.

"I WAS MADE **TOUGHER** THAN ANY STANDARD COURTESAN MODEL.

"MUCH TOUGHER.

"THE SKYES MADE THE IMPERIAL OFFSPRING **MY** CHARGES. MY **CHILDREN!**"

AND I SWORE I WOULD **HELP** THEM.

UHH... JUST HOW LONG AGO **WAS** THIS?

TWO HUNDRED YEARS. I HAVEN'T AGED MUCH.

NO **KIDDING.** BUT **I'M** NOT GETTING ANY YOUNGER.

YOU KNOW THAT WHAT HAPPENED HERE WON'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE IF I HAVE TO TAKE YOU IN.

THESE MAINTENANCE TUNNELS WILL TAKE US TO THE AUXILIARY COMMAND CENTER.

LET'S GO.

THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED. YOU'RE MY KIND OF WOMAN.

12

ELSEWHERE, ON LEVEL 24...

COAST IS CLEAR.

LET'S GO.

NO! NOT THAT WAY.

SOMEBODY'S WAITING IN THE DARK!

I THOUGHT YOU WERE A DEAD-HEAD NOW.

I AM. MOSTLY. BUT I CAN STILL SENSE A LITTLE...

...AND THERE'S SOMETHING THERE!

MAYBE YOUR POWER'S COMING BACK, HUH, KID?

MAYBE SO.

MAYBE I'M JUST GETTING HELP.

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO--!

BREAK

HOW CAN YOU **NAVIGATE** THROUGH THESE TUNNELS?

I'VE SAILED THE MEREDITH A **HUNDRED** TIMES AND I COULDN'T DO IT!

ANOTHER TRADE SECRET... BESIDES, THE **REAL** QUESTION IS... WHY DO YOU WEAR THAT **OUTFIT?**

EVERYBODY ASKS THAT. SIMPLE.

IT'S FUN, IT'S LOW MAINTENANCE, IT TENDS TO **FREEZE** THE OPPOSITION IN MOMENTS OF SURPRISE...

...AND IT PISSES OFF **ALL** THE RIGHT PEOPLE. ANY-THING ELSE?

NOPE. I **KNEW** YOU WERE MY KIND OF WOMAN!

BUT KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.

WE'RE THERE...

...AND WE'RE NOT ALONE.

THESE GUYS ARE A LITTLE **TOO** THOROUGH.

NOT REALLY. THEY SHOULD HAVE POSTED MORE GUARDS. ONE ISN'T ENOUGH.

MY BLADE IS TOO BIG TO GET THROUGH THE WIRE MESH AND A GUN'S TOO LOUD.

NO PROBLEM.

MY ANCESTORS USED SLINGS WITH DEADLY EFFECT.

WHRIP WHRIP WHRIP!

THEY CALLED THEM **SLAMMERS.**

THEY MUST HAVE LIKED THE NAME.

HUH?

WHRIPWHRIPWHRIPWHR

THSSSH!

PLICK!

WHERE DO YOU KEEP GETTING THIS STUFF?

REMEMBER THE ASSASSIN WHO TRIED TO KILL ME? I FOUND HIS STASH.

HE WAS VERY WELL-EQUIPPED... AND I'VE MADE A FEW MODIFICATIONS.

LET'S GO!

MAYBE YOU WERE RIGHT.

THESE GUYS ARE A LITTLE TOO THOROUGH.

NOW WHAT?

GIVE ME A MINUTE. I NEED TO TRY SOMETHING AGAIN.

damn!

NO GOOD!

TOO FAR!

TOO MUCH TELEPATHIC INTERFER-ENCE.

OR MAYBE I STILL HAVEN'T FULLY **RECOVERED** FROM THE DRUGS YOUR PEOPLE GAVE ME.

NOT EXACTLY.

WHAT **WAS** THAT? TELEPATHY?

MIND LINKAGE? NO **WONDER** SLAMMERS ARE SO HARD TO BEAT.

DON'T GUESS **TOO** MUCH, COLONEL. BUT WE ARE STUCK NOW.

WE'LL **HAVE** TO TAKE THE BRIDGE. NOT EASY WITH JUST THE TWO OF US, A COUPLE OF YOUR BULLS AND A DEADHEAD TELEPATH.

WELL, DON'T TELL ANYONE I TOLD YOU, BUT...

...YOUR ARMOR **IS** ON BOARD.

16

WHAT?

I KNOW I SAID IT WAS BEING SENT BY ANOTHER SHIP. I LIED.

WE DON'T **HAVE** THAT MANY SHIPS OUT HERE ON THE GALACTIC RIM.

I **MUST** BE GETTING OLD. I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT MYSELF.

YOUR ARMOR IS STASHED ON THE BRIDGE.

NOT EVEN CAPTAIN SALARDO KNEW ABOUT IT.

SECURITY PRECAUTION.

BUT HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET TO IT?

I GOT ANOTHER OF THE ASSASSIN'S TRICKS HERE.

HE HAD IT WITH HIM WHEN HE TRIED TO KILL ME.

I USED IT ON **HIM** TO BUY SOME TIME.

THUMMMMMMM!

BUT HERE'S THE DEAL, COLONEL.

IF WE MAKE IT, I GET TO PHONE HOME FIRST.

HOW DO I LOOK?

WELL, YOUR OWN **MOTHER** WOULDN'T KNOW YOU, BUT I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT THE SKYES.

"AND I'LL THINK ABOUT THE PHONE CALL."

ANOTHER **BURST** OF INTER-FERENCE! IT **HAS** TO BE--

AH. AWAKE ALREADY, PRIVATE STARK? YOU HAVE **STAMINA.** GOOD. YOU'LL NEED IT.

VIDIOT! YOU **SCUM!** YOU **TRAITOR!**

HE CAN'T HEAR YOU. AND BETRAYING YOU WASN'T **HIS** IDEA, PRIVATE. IT WAS WAS **MINE.**

PITY YOU DIDN'T HAVE MORE OF **THOSE** CLEVER LITTLE DEVICES. BUT USUALLY, ONLY **ROYALTY** HAS ACCESS TO BRAINBLOCKERS.

WHERE DID **YOU** GET IT?

GO TO HELL!

WRONG ANSWER.

YOU COWARD!

SKREAK!

ACTUALLY, I'D BE DOING THIS **ANY-WAY.**

I USED THE SHOCK OF VIDIOT'S NECRO-TELEPATHY TO ACCESS HIM AND BLOCK HIS ABILITIES TEMPORARILY.

I NUDGED HIM INTO TESTING THE VARIOUS PATRONS AT THE BAR IN THE HOPES OF GET-TING THE SLAMMER KILLED.

ALL WITHOUT HIS KNOWING IT, OF COURSE.

BUT RENSSELAER'S VERY STRONG.

HE'D HAVE RECOVERED EVENTUALLY.

HE'LL **STILL** RECOVER, BUT ONLY AFTER I'VE REWIRED HIS BRAIN. THEN HE'LL BE **MINE.**

JUST LIKE CAPTAIN SALAROO. I ACCESSED HIS DEEPEST DESIRES...

...AND NOW HE'S GOING TO DIE WILLINGLY FOR ME.

THANKS TO THE PRESUMED DESTRUCTION OF SKY BY THE SLAMMERS UNDER IMPERIAL MANDATE...

...WE PRESENTLY HAVE A FULL-BLOWN REBELLION IN THE OUTER SYSTEMS OF THE SPORADES...

...AND WHILE THE EMPEROR DITHERS, WE'LL STRIKE!

THE SKYES HIRED THE SLAMMERS! IT WAS A SET-UP!

OF COURSE IT WAS. WE LET THE SLAMMERS BELIEVE THE EMPEROR HIRED THEM TO DESTROY HIS ENEMIES...

...JUST AS WE LET THEM THINK THEY'D DESTROYED SKY.

AND WE ENGINEERED THE SLAMMER'S CAPTURE, DROPPING ONE OF HIS OWN SHIPS ON HIM. WE NEEDED HIM.

THE INNER SYSTEMS STILL SUPPORT PHAISTOS...

DEEEM!

...SO WE'VE ARRANGED AN INCIDENT...

...AND SOON THE EMPEROR AND MOST OF HIS GOVERNMENT WILL CEASE TO EXIST!

KLKK

THIS LITTLE BIT OF COMPUTER-CREATED IMAGING WILL BE SHOWN ON THE EMPIRE HOLOCASTS...

...AND REVEAL AN ESCAPED AND DESPERATE STAR SLAMMER SLAUGHTERING THE MEREDITH'S BRIDGE...

...AND TAKING OVER THE SHIP...

...ONLY TO LOSE CONTROL AND BRING IT DOWN ON **TOP** OF KNOSSOS...

...**DESTROYING** THE EMPEROR AND MOST OF HIS GOVERNMENT.

PITY.

FORTUNATELY WE SKYES, THE EMPEROR'S MOST **TRUSTED** COUNCILLORS, WILL STEP IN TO FILL THE VOID.

WITH A SLAMMER TO BLAME AND THE BACKING OF THE SPORADES, THE COUP WILL BE COMPLETE...

...AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL BE **OURS!**

WE MAY EVEN **SUE** THE SLAMMERS FOR **NEGLIGENCE.**

NOW LET'S SEE WHAT'S INSIDE THAT LITTLE BRAIN OF YOURS.

NOOO!

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT SUCH A BIG, BAD SPACE BULL WOULD HAVE HAD A **CRUSH** ON THE **TEACHER.**

THIS **WILL** BE FUN.

WHY PRIVATE STARK, FOR **SHAME.**

THOSE BRAIN BLOCKERS HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN TROUBLESOME. THE EMPEROR IS NO LONGER CONTENT TO BE A MERE FIGURE-HEAD...

...BUT HE HAS DECIDED TO MOVE AGAINST **US**, HIS MOST TRUSTED COUNCILLORS.

ALREADY, HE AND HIS INNER CIRCLE OF DEAD-HEADS WEAR THE BLOCKERS CONSTANTLY AND WE ARE NO LONGER PRIVY TO THEIR SECRET THOUGHTS.

HE'S BEEN MOVING TO ASSERT **IMPERIAL** CONTROL OVER BOTH THE TREASURY AND ARMED FORCES.

WHAT CHOICE DO WE **HAVE** BUT TO ELIMINATE HIM... AND THOSE WHO SUPPORT HIM.

SKRAK

SKREEEEEAK!!

WHERE DID YOU SAY YOUR BRAIN BLOCKERS CAME FROM?

GO... TO...

IT WAS ALL SO SIMPLE.

SNAPT!

THE RE-DOUBTABLE **COLONEL PHAEORA!** WHO **ELSE?**

I **KNEW** THERE WAS MORE TO HER THAN THE COUNCIL SUSPECTED!

AND NO ONE BELIEVES THE RAMBLINGS OF AN OLD WOMAN.

SOME SUBVERTED CLONEDRONES, A LITTLE FOMENTED REBELLION...

...AND IN THE END...

...YOU **WILL** TELL ME WHAT I WANT TO KNOW.

OR PERHAPS YOU ALREADY HAVE? OF **COURSE!**

WE'LL HAVE TO EXAMINE COLONEL PHAEDRA MORE CLOSELY WHEN SHE BECOMES AVAILABLE.

BUT IN THE MEANTIME, I THINK YOU'RE JUST ABOUT READY FOR REWIRING.

I'LL... UHHHHH... I'LL...!

THERE, THERE. I'LL MAKE IT UP TO YOU. PERHAPS I'LL REWIRE THE COLONEL JUST FOR YOU...

...TO BE YOUR PERSONAL SLAVE FOREVER AND EVER.

AND YOU AND YOUR LARGE SERGEANT WILL BECOME MY PERSONAL BODYGUARDS. QUITE AN HONOR, EH?

SNAPPT!

KRIK!

THIKT!

POPPT!

CALL ME A SENTIMENTALIST, BUT I'VE ALWAYS LOVED HAPPY ENDINGS.

EH? THAT'S STRANGE. I'M NO LONGER MONITORING THE ENTIRE BRIDGE.

LET ME RECHECK MY ACCESS NUMBERS!

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FOUND IT! RIGHT WHERE PHAEDRA SAID--

UH OH.

HALF THE MEN DON'T RESPOND! BUT **HOW**-- THEY'VE BEEN **TERMINATED!**

AND WHO IS **THAT**?

SECURITY! LOOK ALIVE!

THERE'S AN **UNAUTHORIZED SKYE** ON THE BRIDGE!

BRING HIM DOWN!

PKOW PHOW

I CAN'T ACCESS HIM!

BY THE BULL'S HORNS! THAT'S NO SKYE!

IT'S THE SLAMMER!

UHH HH!

HE'S STILL ALIVE!

KILL HIM! KILL HIM NOW!

NEXT ISSUE:

THE CONTRACT

WHEREIN ALL OBLIGATIONS ARE FULFILLED.

KILL IT! KILL IT!

the minoan agendas

chapter five: THE CONTRACT

ROJAS REACHED THE BRIDGE OF THE **MEREDITH** BY **STEALTH.**

HE IS CURRENTLY DEPARTING IT BY **VIOLENCE!**

IT'S THE **STAR SLAMMER,** YOU **FOOLS!**

HE'S ONLY **DISGUISED** AS ONE OF US! **KILL HIM!**

KILL HIM!

SNAPP!

RACHET!

LOCK!

RACHET!

LOAD!

KERASH!

HE'LL HAVE TO WAIT!

FTSAPPT!

FTSAPPT!

ARRGH!

FTZAPPT!

FTZSAPPT!

FTSASPT!

I'VE GOT FIRST DIBS ON EVERY SKY IN THIS ROOM!

GACCKKK!

PHAEDRA!

HOT DAMN!

COLONEL!

THE BRIDGE IS **CRAWLING** WITH SKYES! SHE HASN'T GOT A **CHANCE!**

BUT NOT EVEN A SLAMMER'S ASSESSMENT OF A TACTICAL SITUATION IS ALWAYS CORRECT.

GEEZUS! NAIL HER BEFORE SHE GETS US **ALL!**

FSTAPP!

THSAPP!

SPTAKK!

SHE'S MOVIN' TOO FAST! I--ARRCHK!

TRACK HER! TRACK HER!

CAN'T! SHE MUST BE WEARING SOME SORT OF INTERFERENCE GENERATOR!

WHERE?

WHO **CARES?** DAMMIT! I CAN'T GET A FIX-- AIEEEE!

THUD

KERUNCH!

PLAKUNK!

UNBELIEV-ABLE! SHE'S WIPING OUT OUR FINEST WARRIORS IN SECONDS...

...BUT THIS TIME SHE'S OVER-REACHED HERSELF!

I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO BREAK THROUGH HER MENTAL SCREENS BEFORE...

...BUT I'VE NEVER BEEN THIS CLOSE TO HER BEFORE, EITHER!

AT THIS RANGE, I CAN BREAK ANYBODY!

SKREEEEEEEEEEATH

thawp

OHHHH! MY HEAD!

WHAT--? THE SKYES' MATRIARCH ABOARD SHIP! THIS IS YOUR DOING!

I WON'T BE BROKEN! STILL TIME TO--!

YOUR TIME, PHAEDRA, IS UP!

UH-OH!

COLONEL!

ARRRRRGH! RRRRRA--?

SOJAR! NO! DON'T COME OUT!

URRR? ROJAS NO CHOICE! SOJAR NEEDED!

NO! IF YOU COME OUT, YOU MAY SAVE ME, BUT PHAEDRA AND THE OTHERS WILL DIE!

SOJAR MUST! MAN-HALF DYING!

SO WHAT? LOOK AT THE SKYES. IT'S A GOOD DAY FOR IT.

BUT NOT YET!

PTHUP! THUP!

6

SPLANNG!

SPLANNG!

WHA--?

INCREDIBLE! I CAN'T BELIEVE ANYBODY COULD MAKE THAT SHOT!

C'MON, PRIVATE!

TIME TO START EARNING THOSE BIG BUCKS WE PAY YOU!

PTHAKK

PTHAK!

YES, SIR, SERGEANT KALI!

WITH PLEASURE, SIR!

WHOOHM!

THWAM!

THWAM!

NOW, SOJAR! WHILE EVERY-BODY'S BUSY! NOW!

TOO MUCH BLOOD LOST. TOO LATE. NO MOVE!

THWAM!

I DIDN'T ASK FOR A MEDICAL REPORT!

LIFT MY ARM! THE CATCH IS ON THE SIDE!

PRINT CONFIGURATION I.D. SHOULD DO THE REST!

LIFT, BLAST YOU!

THRAMM!

ROJAS TOO MOODY.

SHUT UP NOW. SOJAR TRY!

THE MOVEMENT IS AGONIZINGLY SLOW...

...THE HAND CRAWLS UP THE SIDE OF THE BOX A FRACTION OF AN INCH...

...AT A TIME...

...SLOWLY...

...SLOWLY...

...UNTIL AT LAST...

clikk!

BATHANG!

SPLANG!

BATHANG!

THWAK!

zipp

...AND IN LESS THAN FIVE SECONDS...

MEDICAL SCAN COMPLETE.

SUBJECT AT 21% OPERATIONAL CAPACITY.

49% BLOOD LOSS.

SHOCK REDUCTION INITIATED!

5,000 CC, RINGER'S LACTATE INTRAVENOUSLY.

PLASMA THAWING. TRANSFUSION INITIATED.

EPINEPHRINE, 1 AMP, DIRECTLY TO HEART.

ORGAN REPAIR COMPLETE.

SURFACE BODY TRAUMA--37%.

ZING!

PSEUDOSKIN GRAFTS INITIATED.

PROXIMITY SCAN COMPLETE.

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER!

SUBJECT TO 83% OPERATIONAL CAPACITY.

UHH HHHH HH...!

ZINGG!

ALL SYSTEMS GO.

INITIATE DEFENSE.

ARM...

GEEZUS! LOOK!

HOLY --!

...TRACKING...

9

...LOCKED!

ARRRR GGH!

AAAI IEEE EGH!

UGGG GHH!

GAAHH!

UHHH HH!

URRRK!

OWW WH!

PROXIMITY SCAN NEGATIVE. TERMINATE ACTION.

OH, MAN...

...REMIND ME NOT TO DO THIS AGAIN.

THUD! THUNK!

GEEZ.

HE GOT 'EM ALL.

I GUESS THAT'S IT.

NOT YET! YOU HAVEN'T BEATEN US YET.

YOU HAVEN'T BEATEN ME YET!

YOU **DOGS!** YOU SHALL GROVEL ON YOUR KNEES AND **BEG** FOR **DEATH** BEFORE **I'M** THROUGH WITH YOU!

VIDIOT IS STILL **MINE!** AND HE WILL BE THE **KEY** TO YOUR DOOM!

SONG-BIRD!

ON YOUR **KNEES** TO YOUR MASTER, BOY!

YOUR **THOUGHTS** ARE **MINE!**

YOUR **WILL** IS **MINE!** I SHALL BREAK YOUR MIND-BLOCKS...

...AND NOW, YOUR **POWER** IS **MINE,** AUGMENT-ING MY **OWN...**

...UNTIL THERE IS **NOTHING** THAT I CANNOT **DO!**

KRATHWHRAM!

DIE!

DIE!

DIE!

DIE!

THAT SUIT WON'T PROTECT YOU NOW!

SHE'S RIGHT! THE BOY IS THE KEY!

GOT TO BREAK HER HOLD!

RENSSELAER! HEAR ME!

ONLY ONE THING CAN SAVE YOU! THE SIL-VERMIND! I WILL SHOW YOU!

DAMN! THAT INTERFERENCE PATTERN AGAIN! IT IS THE SLAMMER!

I MUST CRUSH HIM! POWER, VIDIOT! MORE POWER!

THAT'S RIGHT, RENSSELAER! USE YOUR POWER!

SHE WOULD TAKE IT FROM YOU AND BREAK YOU! I WILL FREE YOUR MIND!

JOIN ME AND WE WILL BREAK HER!

VIDIOT! STOP!

YOU ARE MINE!

13

JOIN ME! JOIN THE SILVER-MIND!

ROJAS...I... CAN... FEEL... I SEE PICTURES!

VIDIOT! NO!

KALI! STARK! SOMETHING'S HAPPENING!

I THINK ROJAS IS FINALLY ACCESSING SOME SORT OF SLAMMERS' MIND LINK!

THE CONTROL PANELS ARE STARTING TO SHORT OUT! TAKE COVER!

WE WAKE UP SINGING AND CRYING.

WE RECOGNIZE ONE OF OUR NUMBER WE THOUGHT WAS DEAD.

WE FIND THE YOUNG TELEPATH WHO PARTAKES OF OUR UNITY. HE HAS HELPED OUR BROTHER.

ROJAS! I'M FREE! BUT I FEEL LIKE MY HEAD'S EXPLODING!

WE WILL SPARE HIM... BUT WE WILL WIPE HIS MIND OF OUR EXISTENCE.

14

DAMN YOU, SLAMMER! I'LL FRY YOU WHERE YOU STAND!

WE FEEL THE POWERFUL TELEPATH WHO WOULD KILL US.

SHE IS A SKY.

WE THOUGHT THAT WE HAD SLAIN THEM ALL.

WE WERE MISTAKEN.

WE WILL CORRECT THAT MISTAKE.

NO! NO! HELP ME! AAAR RGH!

IT IS DONE.

15

WE DETECT A NEUTRAL NET...

...THE EFFECTS ARE FAMILIAR... MORE SKYES... A **COUNCIL**... A **COMMUN-ITY**...

SONGBIRD? WE'VE LOST YOU! WHERE ARE YOU? SONGBIRD!

THE SILVERMIND IS SLIPPING AWAY.

THE DISTANCE IS TOO GREAT...

...AND ONE OF OUR ANCHORS IS FAILING. ROJAS...

OHHHH HHHHH...

THE SILVERMIND'S **GONE**! I'VE LOST CONTACT!

SONGBIRD IS **DEAD**! AND SO ARE THE **REST** OF THE SKY STRIKE-FORCE!

WE MUST REGROUP! **BREAK CONTACT**!

THE SKY COUNCIL IS FADING, TOO!

BUT THEY'RE **ALIVE**! THE SKYES ARE **ALL** STILL **ALIVE**!

FIRST THINGS FIRST. RENSSELAER?

PULSE STRONG. COLOR'S RETURNING.

HE'S JUST FAINTED. AND NO WONDER.

16

KA-ZAR

SUIT, WHAT'S MY PROGNOSIS?

STILL OPERATING AT 67% CAPABILITY. VITAL SIGNS STEADY BUT SLOWLY DIMINISHING.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL AID CURRENTLY AT MAX LEVELS. PROGNOSIS GUARDED.

NOT MUCH TIME LEFT.

PLUG ME INTO THE SHIP.

AS I THOUGHT. THE SKYES ARRIVED IN A SMALL ATTACK CRAFT THAT IS STILL MOORED TO THE MEREDITH.

DOWNLOAD OF SHIP'S MEMORY BANKS COMPLETE. SOFTWARE INTERFACE COMPLETE.

TOGETHER, WITH THE SURVIVING LIFEPODS, THEY SHOULD BE ABLE TO CARRY THE SHIP'S ENTIRE COMPLEMENT.

STAND BY.

AWAKE, HUH? YOU DID GOOD, YOU AND YOUR BOYS.

SWELL. DOES THAT MAKE US HONORARY STAR SLAMMERS?

IF WE HAVE ANY OPENINGS, I'LL LET YOU KNOW.

I MAY NEED A JOB. THE EMPEROR WILL BE FURIOUS I LET YOU GET AWAY.

17

DON'T WORRY. I'LL GET YOU OFF THE HOOK.

I HAVE AN IDEA.

SIR, WHAT SORT OF WEAPON DID YOU FREE US WITH? I DIDN'T RECOGNIZE IT.

COLONEL... DO YOU STILL WANT US TO...TRY TO **TAKE** HIM?

LIKE WE HAVE A CHANCE? FORGET IT, PRIVATE.

MY SUIT TELLS ME YOU'LL BE OKAY. I MUST REMEMBER TO SEND GENE-TRONICS MY COMPLIMENTS.

COMMANDER...

TERMINAL-VELOCITY AIR GUN I TOOK OFF THE ASSASSIN. THAT'S HOW HE KILLED MY GUARDS AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS FRACAS.

TO SIMULATE EMPTY-HAND COMBAT TECHNIQUE AND MAKE IT LOOK LIKE I'D DONE IT MYSELF TRYING TO ESCAPE.

I **DID** TELL YOUR COLONEL THAT HE WAS VERY WELL EQUIPPED.

YOU EVER DECIDE TO GO GALLIVANTING AGAIN, BE SURE TO CAUSE SOME TROUBLE. I'LL FIND YOU.

MAYBE I'LL SEND YOU A COPY OF MY NEXT BOOK.

AUTO-GRAPHED.

MMMM MMMM.

LOOK AFTER HER, BOYS...

...AND TELL RENSSE-LAER HE'S GOT A WON-DERFUL GIFT. HE SHOULDN'T WASTE IT.

BUT IF I WERE YOU GUYS, I'D THINK ABOUT FREEING THE PASSENGERS AND DEPART-ING THIS JUNKER.

SOON.

UGG. I DON'T **FEEL** OKAY. I FEEL LIKE USED FOOD.

STARK, FLIP ON THAT MONITOR! WHERE THE HECK IS HE GOING?

YESSIR. THERE HE IS, HEADING THROUGH THE POWER CORE TO THE PROPULSION MODULE.

HE LOOKED REAL PALE, COLONEL. THEY TORE HIM UP PRETTY BAD.

YOU THINK HE'S GONNA MAKE IT?

OF **COURSE** HE WILL! NOW SHUT UP AND ZOOM IN ON HIM.

WHAT IS HE **DOING**?

SIR!

THOSE ARE THE **EXPLOSIVE BOLT TRIGGERS** IN CASE OF A REACTOR **EMER-GENCY!**

GEEZUS! HE'S ACTI-VATING THEM!

THIK! THIK! THIK!

MOTHER OF--!

HE'S DIS-ENGAGED THE FUSION DRIVE FROM THE SHIP!

LOOK! IT'S TURNING AWAY, HEADING BACK INTO SPACE!

HE MUST BE CONTROLLING IT THROUGH HIS SUIT'S COMPUTERS!

HE'S CRANKING IT UP TO LIGHT SPEED!

YOU THINK HE CAN GET HOME THAT WAY?

THE SLAMMERS' HOMEWORLD'S GOT TO BE A LONG WAY OFF.

UHHH HH...

MAYBE WE OUGHT TO FREE THE PASSENGERS AND GET OUT OF HERE.

...OH, WOW... MY HEAD...

UHMM...HUH? I'M ACCESSING KILLING THOUGHTS!

THERE'S SOMETHING FUNNY ABOUT THIS THAT I CAN'T QUITE...

STARK! KALI! LOOK OUT!

MURDERERS!

KRTHAA!

WHAOW!

AAAA AAHG!

SERGEANT!

AIE EEEE EEE!

SIR ?

HE JUST NICKED ME, PRIVATE. WHO THE HECK WAS THAT?

21

THE **MEREDITH'S CAPTAIN SALARDO,** SIR. I GUESS HE WAS STILL UNDER SONG-BIRD'S SPELL, EVEN NOW.

LET'S HOPE HE'S THE LAST.

POOR BUGGER.

AWESOME, STARK! THAT WAS A **GREAT** DRAW! I BET YOU'RE FASTER 'N ANY GUN-SLINGER THERE **EVER** WAS!

AND **YOU,** LITTLE BUDDY.

WITH-OUT THAT YELL, WE'D HAVE BEEN DEAD BULLS.

HOW DID YOU--DON'T **TELL** ME...?

I'M **BACK!** I'M NOT A **DEADHEAD** ANYMORE!

SONGBIRD BROKE OPEN MY BLOCKS WHEN SHE TRIED TO **USE** ME!

I'M A REAL **TELE-PATH** AGAIN!

SO DO YOU WANT TO GO BACK TO BEING THE EMPEROR'S TAME **LAP DOG?**

WHAT'S **THAT** CRACK SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

HE MEANS, YOUNG MAN, THAT IF YOUR POWERS STAY "GONE," YOUR LIFE WILL BE-COME YOUR OWN.

YOU MIGHT EVEN GROW UP TO BE A SPACE BULL SOMEDAY... IF YOU'RE **BIG** ENOUGH.

HAH! WITH THE FORTUNE I'VE ALREADY MADE, I CAN BE ALTERED TO WHATEVER SIZE I **WANT!** EVEN BIGGER THAN YOU TWO.

HAHAHA HAHAHAHA HAHA!

SQUA WACCK!

THAT'S ODD. WHO'S USING THE INTER-SHIP COMLINK? WE'RE THE ONLY ONES **HERE.**

22

DON'T TELL ME YOU'VE FORGOTTEN ME ALREADY, PHAEDRA? I HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN **YOU.**

ROJAS! WHAT--? YOU LOOK AWFUL.

I'LL LIVE... LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE GOOD ON THE SLAMMERS' **ORIGINAL** CONTRACT.

BUT... THE SKYES THEMSELVES **MADE** THAT CONTRACT.

AND I'M GOING TO MAKE CERTAIN THEY GET THEIR MONEY'S WORTH.

THAT SHOULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARD EARNING THE EMPEROR'S FORGIVE-NESS.

I'VE REACTIVATED ALL THE LIFE-PODS. SKY SHIPS ARE STILL TETHERED TO THE **MEREDITH.**

PASSENGERS AND CREW ARE LOCKED UP ON LEVELS 23 AND 24...

...AND THE EMPIRE'S ALREADY SENDING RESCUE TEAMS.

YOU'D BETTER BEGIN YOUR EVACUATION.

OUR WHAT --?

THE **MEREDITH** IS AN OLD MILITARY SHIP. SHE'S STILL EQUIPPED WITH SELF-DESTRUCT CHARGES. I'VE ACTIVATED THEM.

WHAT?! WHY?

"I WAS AN ONBOARD PRISONER FOR SOME TIME, COLONEL. I CAN'T BE SURE WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT ME...OR THE SLAMMERS ...WHILE I WAS UNCON-SCIOUS.

"AND I CAN'T AFFORD TO TAKE **ANY** CHANCES.

"THE **MEREDITH** WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN ONE HOUR.

"I WOULDN'T WASTE ANY MORE TIME IF I WERE YOU.

"SO LONG!"

GEEE-ZUS!

SOME FORTY-FIVE MINUTES LATER...

...AFTER A MAD SCRAMBLE...

AND TWENTY MINUTES AFTER THAT...

...THE **MEREDITH** BLEW ITSELF OUT OF EXISTENCE...

WOW! LIKE... HE REALLY **DID** IT!

WELL, AT LEAST HE GAVE US AN EXTRA FIVE MINUTES. BUT HOW DID HE KNOW ABOUT THE SHIP'S CHARGES?

I'VE FINALLY FIGURED OUT THAT PART.

THAT DAMN **MONKEY**-BRAIN COMPUTER! HE'S PROBABLY BEEN PROGRAMMED WITH EVERY LOUSY SHIP TYPE IN THE **GALAXY.** NO WONDER HE KNEW WHERE EVERYTHING WAS!

OH, **BROTHER!** NOW I **GET** IT!

I KNOW WHERE HE'S TAKING THE **MODULE!**

NO YOU DON'T, PRIVATE STARK. WE DON'T KNOW **ANYTHING.**

AND THAT'S THE WAY IT'S GOING TO **STAY,** UNDERSTAND?

I HOPE SO. HE **WAS** A LOT OF TROUBLE...

...BUT I **WOULD** LIKE THAT AUTO-GRAPH.

I'M NOT SPENDING THE REST OF **MY** LIFE ANSWERING INANE QUESTIONS FROM TABLOID HOLO-CAST REPORTERS ABOUT STAR SLAMMERS.

UNDER-STOOD, SIR. I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER HIS NAME.

HE SURE WAS A **LOT** OF TROUBLE, WASN'T HE?

YOU THINK HE'LL LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE IT? OR GET HOME ALIVE?

"WE INTERRUPT OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED BROADCAST OF 'MONKEYMAN AND O'BRIEN' TO BRING YOU THIS SPECIAL NETWORK HOLOCAST NEWS UPDATE.

"AT APPROXIMATELY 11:57 A.M., STANDARD MINOAN TIME, AN APPARENT FUSION EXPLOSION OCCURRED IN THE OUTER SYSTEM OF THE SPORADES.

"INITIAL REPORTS SUGGEST THAT THE ENTIRE VILLAGE OF SKY ON THE PLANET SCYROS, RECENTLY DAMAGED IN A RAID BY THE NOTORIOUS STAR SLAMMERS, WAS COMPLETELY VAPORIZED.

"THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF SKY HAD ONLY JUST RETURNED HOME TO HELP WITH THE VILLAGE'S RECOVERY. THERE ARE NO KNOWN SURVIVORS.

"NO CAUSE HAS YET BEEN DETERMINED, BUT THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT THE STARSHIP ***MEREDITH***... THE FREIGHTER CARRYING THE CAPTURED SLAMMER... WAS IN TROUBLE AND MAY HAVE BROKEN UP.

"THE EMPEROR IS SAID TO BE DEVASTATED.

"DETAILS ON OUR NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED NEWSCAST."

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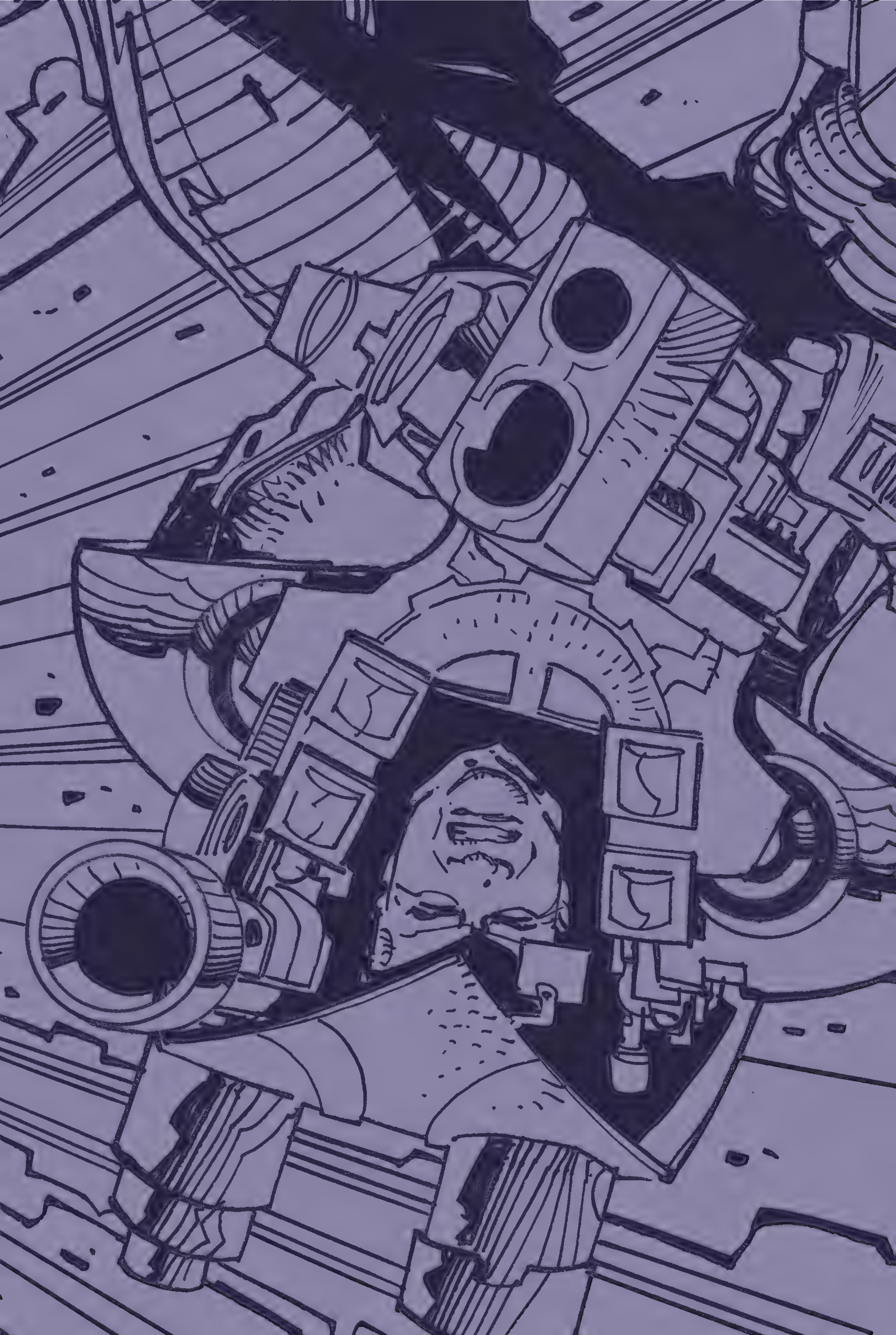


THE SKY IS FALLING...

ONCE UPON A TIME AT THE EDGE OF THE GALAXY...

...THERE WAS A **STARSHIP** OF IMMENSE POWER CALLED THE **MEREDITH**...

...AND A **VILLAGE** OF DEADLY TELEPATHS NAMED **SKY**.

EVENTUALLY, THANKS TO A STAR SLAMMER NAMED **ROJAS**...

...THE STARSHIP AND THE VILLAGE CAME TO OCCUPY EXACTLY THE SAME SPACE AT EXACTLY THE SAME TIME.

9.15.94

THERE **WERE** NO SURVIVORS.

BUT THERE WAS... SOMETHING.

BRAKRAKRAK

I LIVE! I STILL **LIVE!**

ROJAS! STAR SLAMMERS! HEAR ME!

I WILL HAVE MY **REVENGE!**

I WILL FIND YOU!

AND KILL YOU **ALL!**

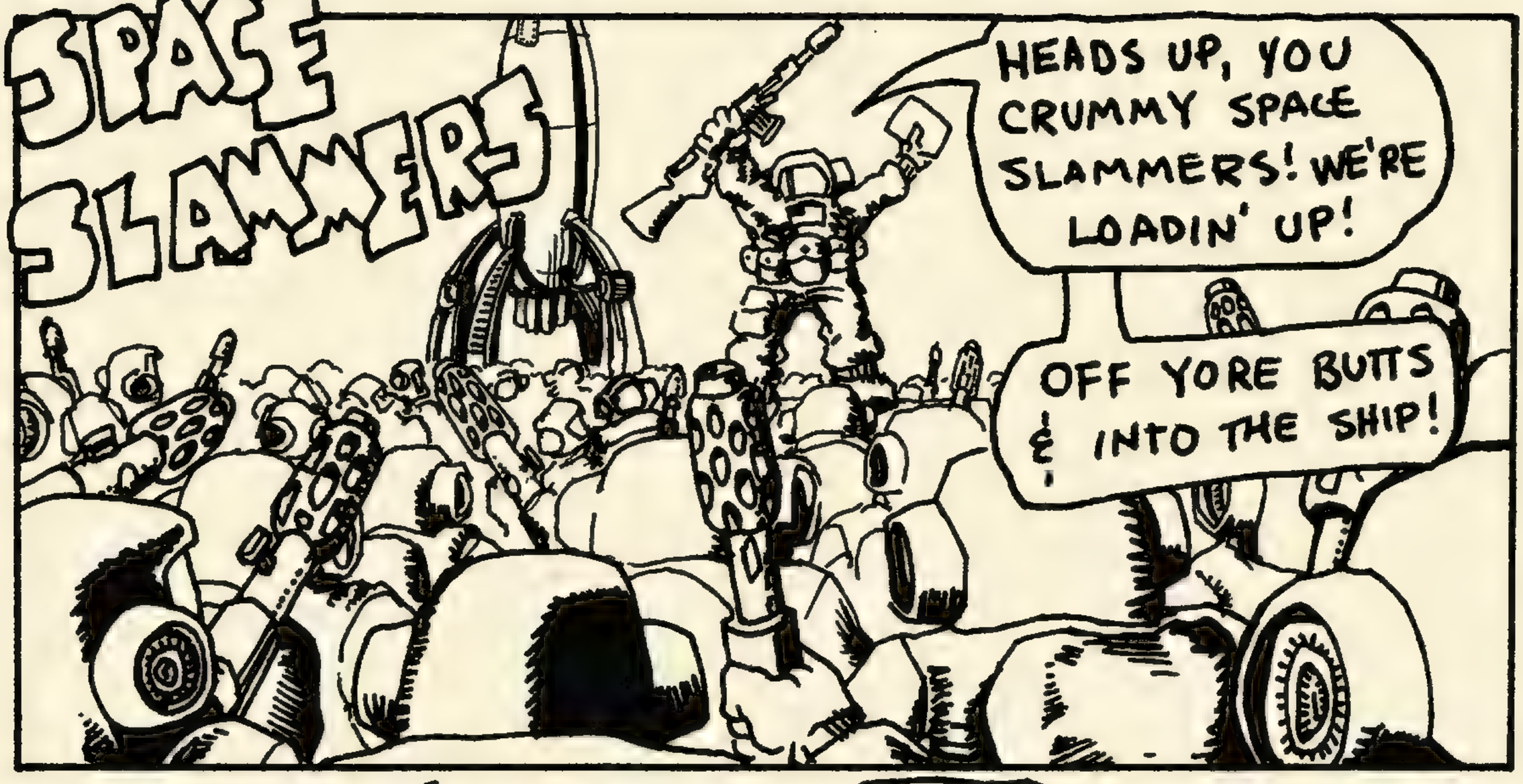
TO BE CONTINUED...

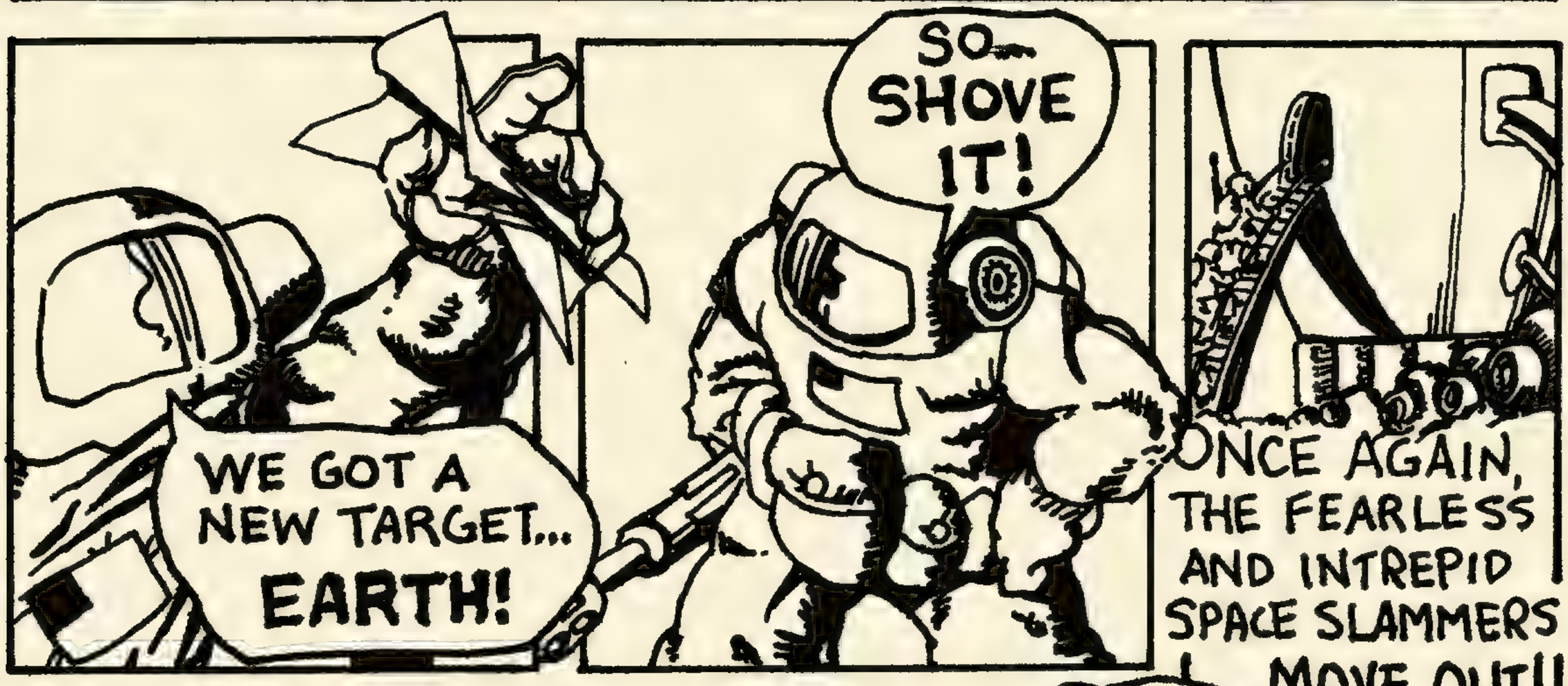
Star Slammers: THE RISD YEARS

In The Beginning…

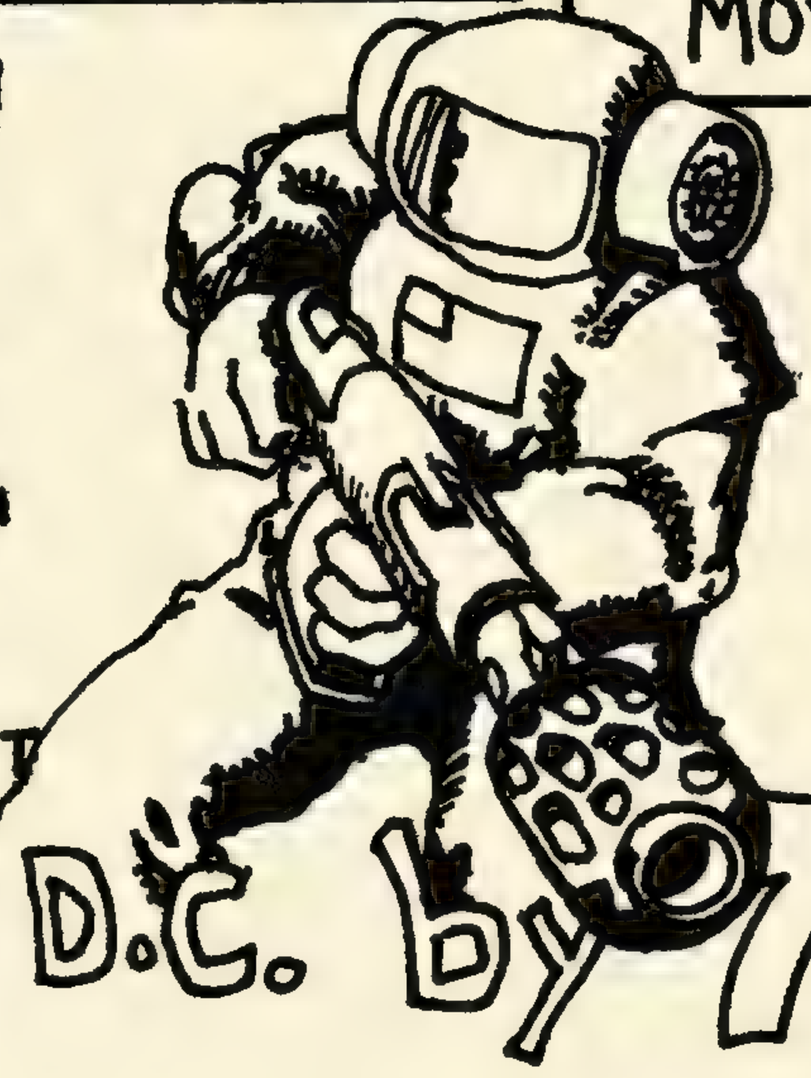
Pages 220 through 289 presents the first *Star Slammers* stories told by Walter Simonson, created while he was a student at the Rhode Island School of Design. For more on the history of the early *Star Slammers*, please see Simonson's introduction on page 4 of this volume.

THE SPACE SLAMMERS





THE SPACE SLAMMERS! DREADED MERCENARIES OF SPACE! LIKE THE RAVENING ARMY ANTS, THEY SWARM THRU THE UNIVERSE! NOTHING CAN WITHSTAND THEIR ON-SLAUGHT! AND THIS TIME, THEY HAVE ANOTHER TARGET



WASHINGTON D.C. BY 74!

4-1-70

A QUIET TUESDAY... HEADQUARTERS.

GOOD MORNING, SIR. YESSIR, THERE ARE.

AH, GOOD MORNING, CORPORAL. ANY DISPATCHES FOR US TODAY?

THANK YOU, SON.

RRRIPPP!

OH-OH!

SOMETHING... WRONG, SIR

JUST BARELY, CORPORAL! HOW'D YOU LIKE A NICE CUSHY JOB RUNNIN' THIS OUTFIT! I'VE SUDDENLY BEGUN TO CONSIDER **RETIREMENT!**

SIR!?

OUR PERIOD OF **BENIGN NEGLECT** IS OVER! THE **SPACE SLAMMERS** ARE COMING!!

Simonson 4-1-70

SPACE SLAMMERS

NUMBERLESS AS THE GRAINS OF SAND, THE SHIPS OF THE SPACE SLAMMERS ROAR ACROSS THE GALAXY, SEEKING THE PLANET EARTH, FOR THEY ARE MERCENARIES AND HAVE ACCEPTED A CONTRACT TO *DESTROY TERRA!*

8-11-70

WE'VE GOT A BOGEY SIR! GREEN 2, STRENGTH 9!

DISPATCH A NEEDLE. *IDENTIFICATION!*

THE SINGLE SEAT SCOUT BURNS AWAY FROM THE FLEET AFTER THE BOGEY ON THE FAR-FLUNG DETECTION SCREENS!

«ALPHA I REPORTING SIR! OBJECT OF PLANETARY DIMENSIONS APPEARING AHEAD! WHITE, SPHERICAL-SEEMS TO BE ROTATING... MY GOD! LOOK-IT'S...

=CLICK!=

ALL STATIONS ALERT! NEAR SQUADRON MOVE TO INTERCEPT AND **DESTROY!**

SIR-THE SCOUT'S **GONE!** BOGEY'S STILL VISIBLE!

NUMBERLESS AS THE GRAINS OF SAND,

THE STAR SLAMMERS

HURL THEIR SHIPS ACROSS THE GALAXY TO DESTROY *WASHINGTON DC* AND PREVENT AN INTRA-GALACTIC CONFERENCE FROM TAKING PLACE THERE IN '74!

SIR, WE'VE GOT A BOGEY, GREEN 2 STRENGTH 9.

IT'S TOO CLOSE. DISPATCH A NEEDLE. INTERCEPT AND IDENTIFY.

THE SINGLE SEAT SCOUT BURNS AWAY FROM THE FLEET.

ALPHA 1 REPORTING. OBJECT OF PLANETARY DIMENSIONS APPEARING AHEAD. WHITE, SPHERICAL - SEEMS TO BE ROTATING - *MY GOD! LOOK OUT! IT'S THE...*

=CLICK=

SIR! THE NEEDLE'S GONE! BOGEY STILL VISIBLE!

ALL STATIONS ALERT! SQUADRON SIX MOVE TO INTERCEPT AND *DESTROY!*

I REDREW THE FIRST PAGE OF THIS STORY A YEAR OR TWO LATER, WITH AN UPDATED TITLE AND HARDWARE - WMS

EEEE

NO!

THE IRON KING!

THE IRON KING!!

THE LEGEND THAT SEEKS THE SOULS OF DYING STARSHIPS AND DEVOURS THEM!

SHAKE US LOOSE!! I WANT A STRING OF CRUISERS AROUND THAT THING IN SEVEN MINUTES!

...BUT NO ONE IN THE FLEET HAS SEVEN MINUTES!

SUDDENLY, A TERRIFYING SCREAM RIPS APART THE SPACE AROUND THE FLEET, SHATTERING THE MINDS OF THE SLAMMERS!

NOT EVEN THE **FLAGSHIP** IS IMMUNE! AND WHEN THE SCREAMING DIES AND SANITY RETURNS, SEVENTEEN SHIPS HAVE VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE.

ABOARD THE BADLY SHAKEN FLAGSHIP...

COMMANDER, THE **FACE** IS GONE!

WHAT?!

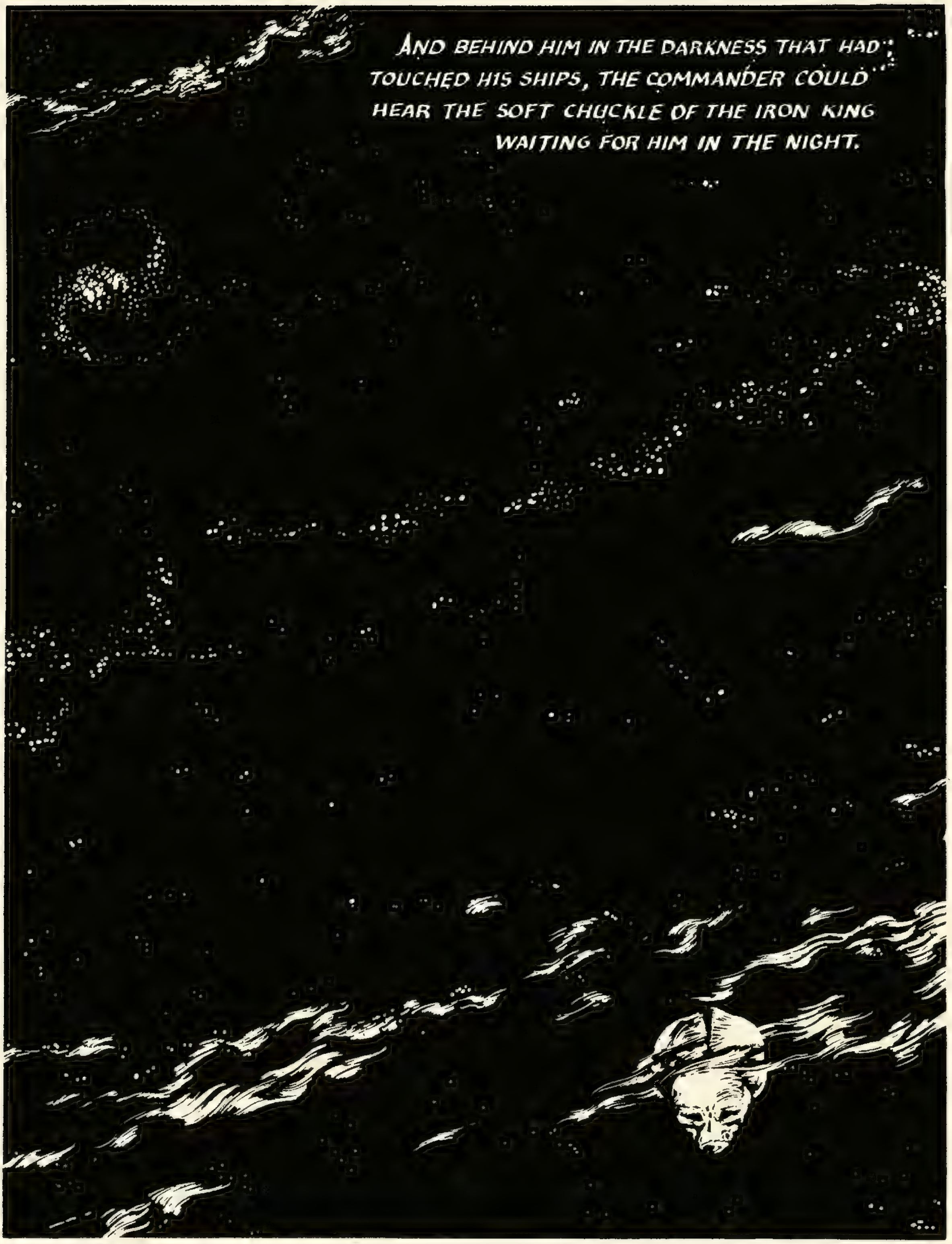
NO SIGN OF IT, SIR. SPACE IS CLEAR!

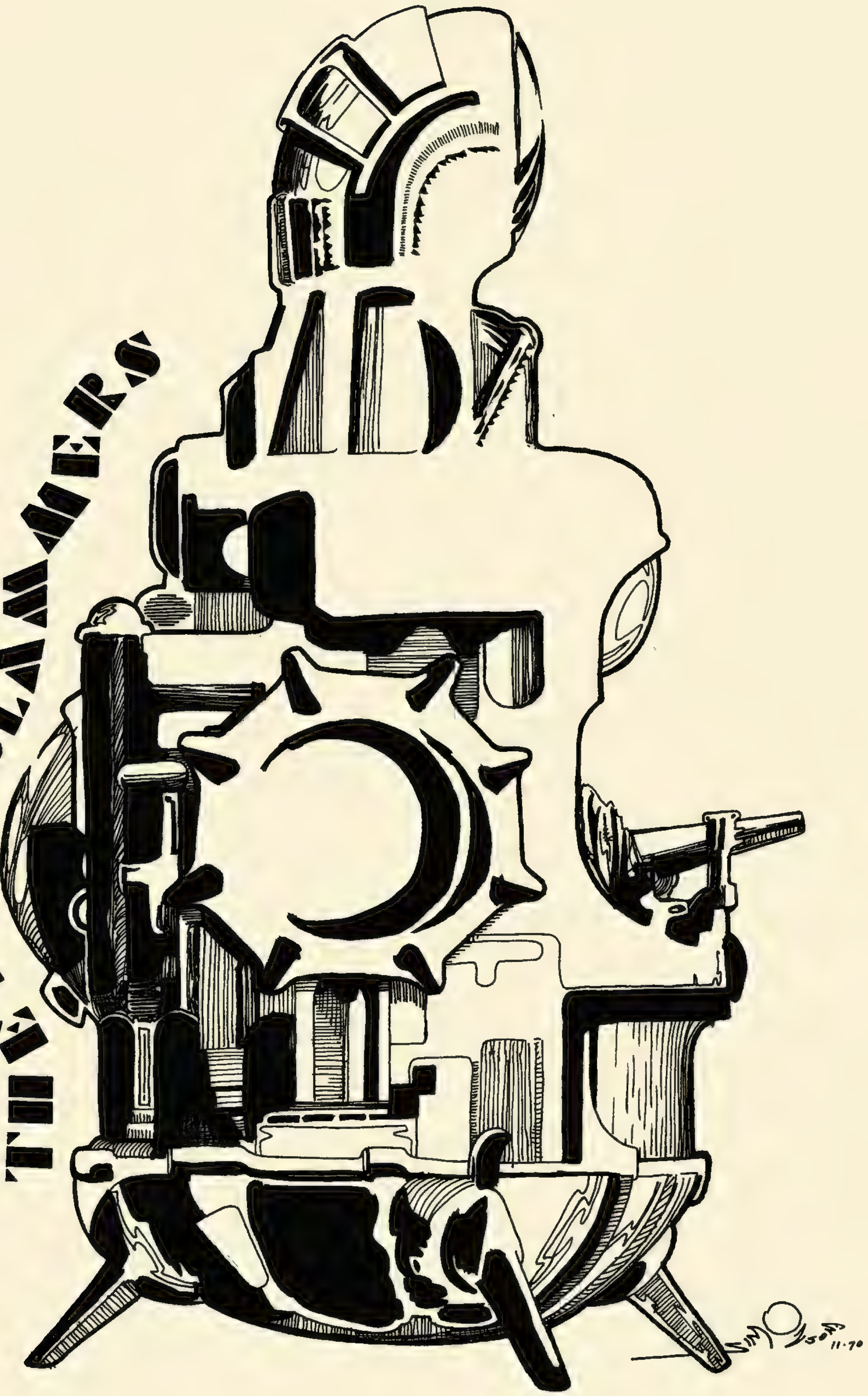
VERY WELL. SIGNAL THE FLEET. RESUME ORIGINAL COURSE FOR EARTH.

SIR! WE'RE NOT LEAVING LIKE THIS? **BEATEN!**

WE'LL RETURN. WE STILL HAVE TO FULFILL OUR CONTRACT REGARDING EARTH AND WE'LL NEED OUR FULL STRENGTH.

BUT WE'LL REMEMBER... AND WE'LL BE BACK.


AND BEHIND HIM IN THE DARKNESS THAT HAD TOUCHED HIS SHIPS, THE COMMANDER COULD HEAR THE SOFT CHUCKLE OF THE IRON KING WAITING FOR HIM IN THE NIGHT.


STAR TREK II
STARSHIP MASTERS

WHILE THE STARS SPARKLE LIKE CORUSCATING PINWHEELS, THE JUMPSHIP HAMMERS ITS WAY BACK INTO REALITY FROM THE TWISTED CORRIDORS OF NEVER-NEVER LAND. BEFORE IT, SUSPENDED IN THE SKY LIKE THE FACE OF AN UNFINISHED CLOCK, IS A PLANET. IT WAITS QUIETLY AT THE END OF A LONG ROAD PAVED WITH BARS AND BRIBES AND CLANDESTINE MEETINGS IN DIRTY CORNERS OF THE UNIVERSE. AND IT WAITS WITH AN UNSHAKABLE CONFIDENCE IN ITS OWN INVULNERABILITY, FOR IT IS THE HOMEWORLD OF THE DREADED **STAR SLAMMERS!**

A SINGLE PASSENGER UNDER GUARD DISEMBARKS FROM THE JUMPSHIP AND IS CONDUCTED THROUGH AN ENDLESS SERIES OF CORRIDORS.

AT LAST, THE PASSENGER IS USHERED INTO A WHITE ROOM WITH A SINGLE OCCUPANT. THE MAN RISES TO GREET HIM.

GOOD EVENING, MR. FARRAGUT.

GOOD EVENING, COMMANDER.

I MUST APOLOGIZE FOR THE MANNER IN WHICH YOU WERE BROUGHT HERE BUT INFORMATION ABOUT HOMEWORLD IS AT A PREMIUM. WE HAVE NO FRIENDS, ONLY CUSTOMERS. HENCE THE CLOAK AND DAGGER ARRANGEMENTS. A DRINK?

NO THANK YOU. I SHOULD PREFER TO COME STRAIGHT TO THE POINT.

VERY WELL. PLEASE SIT DOWN.

I REPRESENT A LARGE CORPORATION THAT WISHES TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS. NATURALLY, WE WOULD PAY IN ADVANCE AS A GUARANTEE.

FAIR ENOUGH. YOU ARE AWARE THAT WE'VE NEVER SUCCESSFULLY BEEN DOUBLE CROSSED BY ANYONE!

THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING, COMMANDER. THE SLAMMERS HAVE AN ENVIABLE RECORD OF SUCCESSES. WE HAVE A RATHER LARGE JOB FOR YOU. THE SUCCESS OF THIS PARTICULAR VENTURE IS **VITAL** TO MY CORPORATION!

THEY USUALLY ARE, MR. FARRAGUT. WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU HAVE IN MIND?

THE TARGET IS ON EARTH, THE CITY OF WASHINGTON D.C. THERE'S TO BE AN INTRA-GALACTIC CONFERENCE THERE IN '74. THE CORPORATION I REPRESENT FINDS IT ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL FOR THIS CONFERENCE TO BE PREVENTED.

WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO, MR. FARRAGUT. WE'RE A MILITARY ORGANIZATION, NOT A FIFTH COLUMN.

PRECISELY! YOU SEE, WE DON'T SIMPLY WISH TO PREVENT THIS CONFERENCE. WE WANT THE CITY DESTROYED!

WE DON'T OFTEN ACCEPT A GENERAL DESTRUCTION CONTRACT, PARTICULARLY ON A PLANET THAT ISN'T ALREADY AT WAR.

AFRAID OF RETALIATION?

TACT, MR. FARRAGUT, TACT.

THE DESTRUCTION OF A CITY, ESPECIALLY A VITAL ONE LIKE WASHINGTON, OFTEN HAS CONSEQUENCES FAR BEYOND THE FAIRLY LIMITED SCOPE OF SELF-INTEREST, EVEN THE SELF-INTEREST OF A LARGE "CORPORATION." THE MATTER WOULD HAVE TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE COMMITTEE.

AND IF WE ACCEPT, THE FEE WOULD BE ENORMOUS.

OF COURSE. I TRUST THAT THIS WILL SATISFY YOU ON THAT SCORE.

ADEQUATE. PERHAPS EVEN GENEROUS.

BUT THE MATTER WILL STILL HAVE TO BE TAKEN UNDER ADVISEMENT. YOU, NATURALLY, WILL REMAIN HERE AS OUR GUEST. LIEUTENANT, CONDUCT MR. FARRAGUT TO HIS SUITE.

WE'LL MEET AGAIN SHORTLY. GOOD EVENING.

WHEN THE DOORS HAVE CLOSED BEHIND MR. FARRAGUT, THE WALL BEHIND THE DESK RISES SLOWLY, REVEALING A FULLY OCCUPIED CONFERENCE ROOM!

WELL, GENTLEMEN, ANY QUESTIONS?

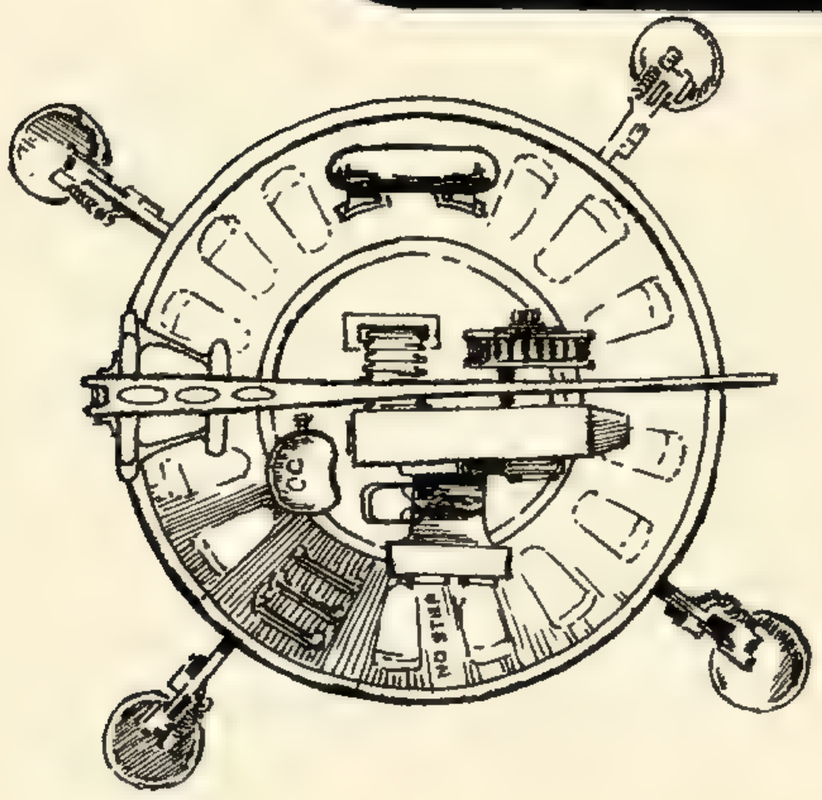
YES, COMMANDER. JUST WHO IS FARRAGUT REPRESENTING?

A LARGE COMBINE OF THE NETHERWORLDS. THIS CONFERENCE THEY'RE SO ANXIOUS TO PREVENT IS PARTLY AIMED AT REDUCING THEIR INFLUENCE AROUND THE GALAXY. THEY'RE AFRAID THEY MAY BE BOXED IN ECONOMICALLY BUT FEAR EXACTS A HIGH PRICE. THEY'RE WILLING TO PAY HANDSOMELY. I SEE NO REASON TO DENY THEM THE PRIVILEGE.

CERTAINLY EARTH WON'T BE ABLE TO TOUCH US. SHE'S STILL SO DIVIDED THAT THE DESTRUCTION OF WASHINGTON WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE VIEWED FAVORABLY IN PRIVATE IN MANY CAPITOLS IF REGRETFULLY IN PUBLIC. NO, WE'LL HAVE NO TROUBLE FROM EARTH. NOR FROM HER ALLIES. THE EARTH WORLDS AREN'T STRONG ENOUGH AT PRESENT TO BE A PROBLEM. AND IF THE NETHERWORLDS THOUGHT **THEY** COULD HANDLE IT, THEY WOULDN'T BE HERE. NO FURTHER QUESTIONS? VERY WELL, GENTLEMEN, CAST YOUR BALLOTS.

DURING HIS THREE DAY STAY ON THE HOMEWORLD OF THE SLAMMERS, MR. FARRAGUT WAS TREATED WITH THE UTMOST COURTESY.

CHAPERONES SAW TO HIS NEEDS AND GUIDED HIM ABOUT THE BASE, KEEPING HIM WELL OUT OF THE WAY OF ANY-THING VITAL, NATURALLY.



DESPITE SUCH PRECAUTIONS, HE CAUGHT SEVERAL GLIMPSES OF RESTRICTED AREAS AND EVEN MANAGED A FEW HOLO-GRAMS. NEEDLESS TO SAY, SUCH SLIPS WERE CAREFULLY STAGED FOR HIS BENEFIT.

The Star Slammers

this episode brought to you by...

the D.C. in '74 Bidding Committee

THERE IS AN OLD STORY THAT SAYS THAT THE TRACKS OF THE STARS ARE ENDLESS, THAT THEY WHEEL ABOUT THE MIND OF THE UNIVERSE FOREVER. ONLY THE GODS KNOW THE TRUTH AND MOST OF THEM ARE DEAD. BUT THE MEN ENDURE ALONG WITH THEIR INSTITUTIONS. A HUNDRED SPEARS, A THOUSAND CANNON, TEN THOUSAND STAR SHIPS, THESE MEN GO TO WAR.

THEY ARE THE

STAR SLAMMERS

ENDLESS CARAVANS FILL THE METAL GUTS OF THE ARMADA AS IT PREPARES TO CROSS THE GALAXY TO DESTROY **WASHINGTON D.C.!**

THE PREPARATIONS ARE UNKNOWN TO THE GALAXY AT LARGE FOR THE ***HOMEWORLD SYSTEM*** IS WELL SHIELDED FROM DETECTION. BUT EVEN SHIELDING DOES NOT PREVENT AN OCCASIONAL ALARM!

RED ALERT
RED ALERT

UNAUTHORIZED TRANSMISSION

IMMEDIATELY, THE SPECTOR TEAMS BEGIN SEARCH PROCEDURES! WITHIN MOMENTS, THE SOURCE OF THE SIGNAL IS DISCOVERED!

NO MISTAKE, COMMANDER! THEY'RE COMING FROM MR. FARRAGUT'S FORMER QUARTERS. *D*-SHIELD'S HOLDING THE SIGNALS IN!

UMM! OUR ILLUSTRIOUS CLIENT HAS LEFT US A MEMENTO. HAS IT BEEN FOUND YET?

YES SIR! THE SPECTORS ARE BRINGING IT IN NOW.

IT'S *HERE*, SIR! ONE OF THE BED POSTS HAD BEEN CORED.

MR. FARRAGUT MUST HAVE BEEN CARRYING A LOT MORE THAN A CHANGE OF CLOTHES.... ALL RIGHT, GENTLEMEN. TAKE IT TO STAGING AREA 5. HAVE IT HOLOED AND WE'LL FEED IT TO BIG JOHN!

BIG JOHN- A STATION TO POINT TELEPORTER WITH AN ENORMOUS POWER CONSUMPTION THAT MAKES IT IMPRACTICAL FOR VERY LARGE ITEMS. FOR SMALL ARTICLES HOWEVER...

IT'S A TRANSMITTER, SUPPOSED TO BROADCAST HOMEWORLD'S LOCATION!

ALL SET, COMMANDER. WHERE DO YOU WANT IT?

WE *OWE* MR. FARRAGUT A FEW UNKIND THOUGHTS FOR THIS. PUT IT ON TOP OF MT. EVEREST, EARTH. HE'LL HAVE SOME SLEEPLESS NIGHTS WHEN THAT SIGNAL REACHES THE NETHERWORLDS.

ARE WE STILL GOING TO EARTH, SIR?

CERTAINLY, SON. A *LITTLE* CHEATING IS EXPECTED.

I WOULD HAVE BEEN GREATLY DISAPPOINTED IF MR. FARRAGUT HADN'T TRIED TO HEDGE HIS BETS SOMEWHERE!

IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOW, THE PREPARATIONS CONTINUE. MR. FARRAGUT'S UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR NOTWITHSTANDING, THE SLAMMERS INTEND TO HONOR THEIR BARGAIN TO DESTROY WASHINGTON, WITH A SLIGHT ADDITIONAL FEE, FOR SERVICES RENDERED NATURALLY.

SO IT IS AT LAST THAT CARGOES ARE SECURE, TROOPERS ARE ABOARD, AND THE GIGANTIC ARMADA IS READY.

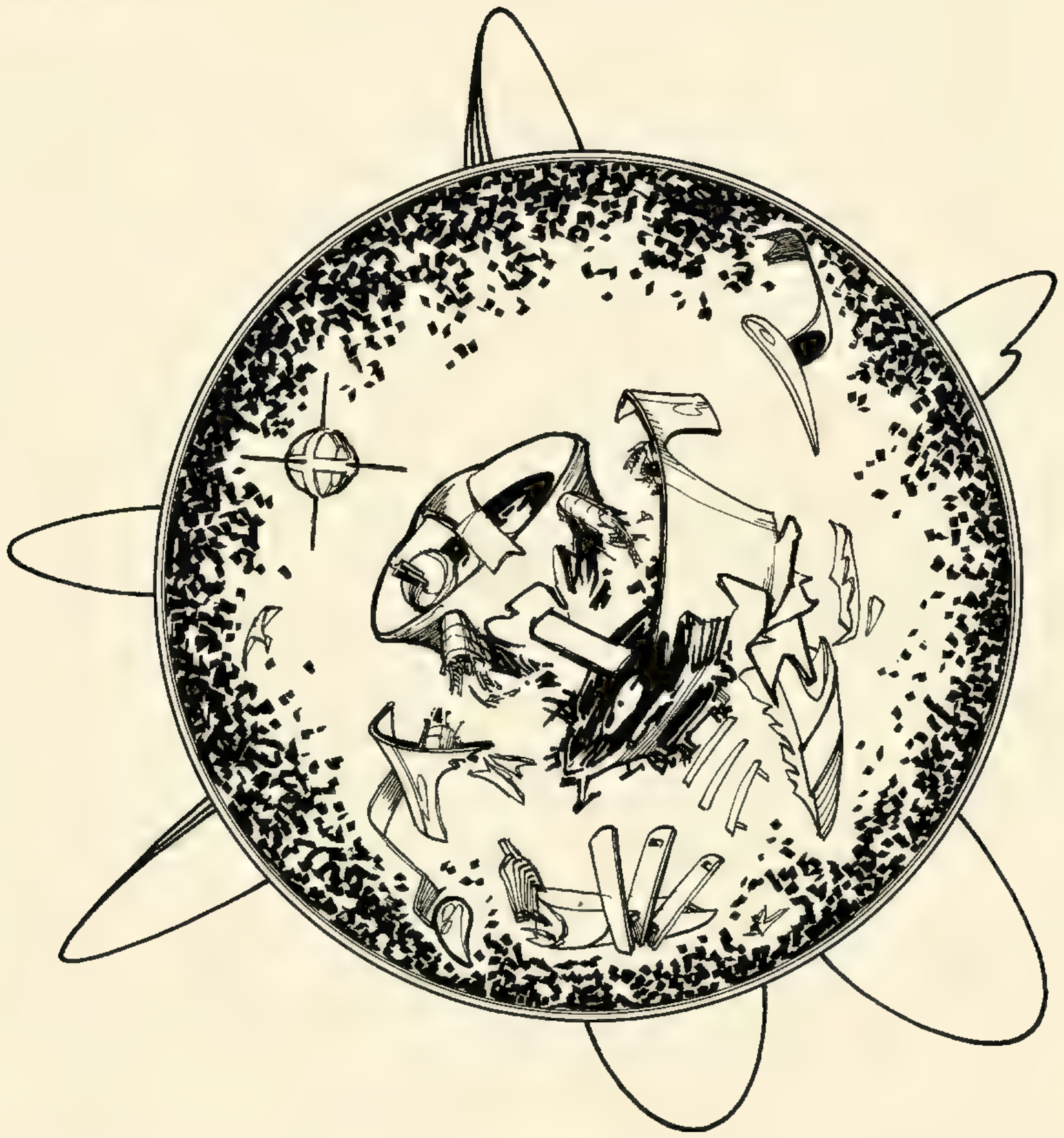
THE *STAR SLAMMERS* GO WITH WAR INTO THE GALAXY!

Washington 74

THE STAR SLAMMERS
CHAPTER III
brought to you by...
THE DC in '74 Bidding Committee

ONLY THE SILENCE MARKS DEATH IN DEEP SPACE BUT THE DESTRUCTION BLINDS A THOUSAND STARSHIPS AS THE BOILING CLOUD OF PLASMA LIGHTS UP THE NIGHT LIKE A NOVA. A MOMENT LATER AND THE STAR HAS VANISHED, LEAVING ONLY THE DARK, THE DEBRIS AND THE SHIPS OF

THE STAR SLAMMERS



FULL ALERT! ALL D-SHIELDS TO EMERGENCY RADIUS!

AMMUNITION SHIP, SIR! COMPLETELY DESTROYED!

AS-235

TWO OTHER SHIPS IN THAT WING ARE HURT BADLY, SIR!

M-O-R-E--IN-F-O-R-M-A-T-I-O-N

REMOVE ALL CREW & SALVAGEABLE EQUIPMENT FROM THE AS-321 AND DESTROY IT! SEND THE AS-235 BACK TO HOMEWORLD AFTER IT'S BEEN EMPTIED. DETACH ONE ESCORT.

WHEN REORGANIZATION HAS BEEN COMPLETED, FLEET OFFICERS WILL REPORT TO SECTION SIX CONFERENCE ROOM.

AFTER THE ORDERS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT, THE CONFERENCE ROOM BEGINS TO FILL UNTIL AT LAST...

ALL BROADCAST SYSTEMS ARE ON, GENTLEMEN. THIS HEARING IS OFFICIALLY CONVENED. DAMAGE CONTROL REPORT?

TWO SHIPS DESTROYED, SIR. BOTH WERE WEAPONS FREIGHTERS. SOME RECOVERABLE EQUIPMENT ABOARD THE SECOND,

A THIRD FREIGHTER WAS DAMAGED, BUT WILL BE ABLE TO RETURN TO HOMEWORLD UNDER ITS OWN POWER.

THE CARGO OF THAT THIRD SHIP WAS TRANSFERRED TO OTHER SHIPS. NEGLIGIBLE DAMAGE TO THREE OTHER SHIPS.

WHAT ABOUT THE MEN?

184 KILLED OR MISSING, SIR. ANOTHER 97 WOUNDED BADLY ENOUGH TO SEND HOME ON THE DAMAGED FREIGHTER.

THANK YOU. WEAPONS SYSTEMS' MONITOR, REPORT ON THE CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSION.

A DEFECTIVE FIRING CAP, SIR, ON ONE OF THE SUNCRACKERS!

THE CAP WASN'T COMPLETELY INERT. IT WAS ACTIVATED BY THE REPEATED JUMPS INTO HYPERSPACE. WHEN IT BLEW, SO DID THE CRACKER AND THE PLASMA SUN DID THE REST!

THAT LEAVES ONLY ONE QUESTION. WILL THE STAR SLAMMER WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INSPECTION OF THAT PARTICULAR WEAPONS SYSTEM IDENTIFY HIMSELF?

YES, SIR!

YOUR EXPLANATION, LIEUTENANT?

THE CLEAR AWAY SIREN SOUNDED, SIR. I... LEFT FIVE SUNCRACKERS UNCHECKED.

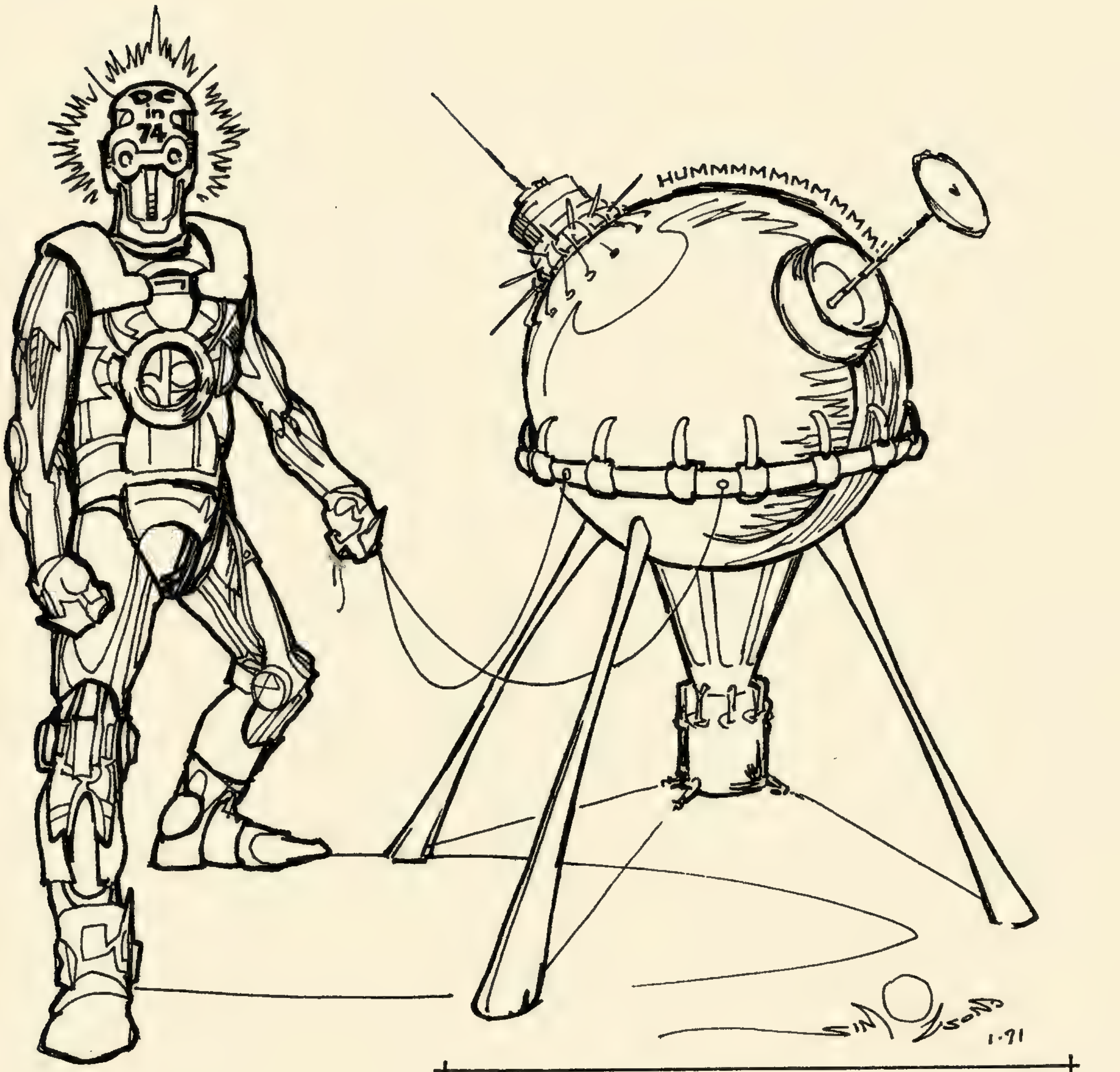
YOUR EXCUSE?

NONE, SIR.

EARTH IS FRAGMENTED BUT STILL STRONG. WE ATTACK ONLY ONE CITY AND ONE NATION THERE BUT DESPITE OUR OWN PROJECTIONS, WE MAY YET PROVE TO BE THE RALLYING CRY FOR THE EARTHWORLD! IF WE ARE TO DESTROY WASHINGTON DC TO PREVENT THE INTRAGALACTIC CONFERENCE IN '74, WE MAY NEED OUR FULL STRENGTH

YOUR ERROR IN JUDGEMENT HAS COST US DEARLY.

LIEUTENANT, REPORT TO YOUR QUARTERS. I'M SORRY.



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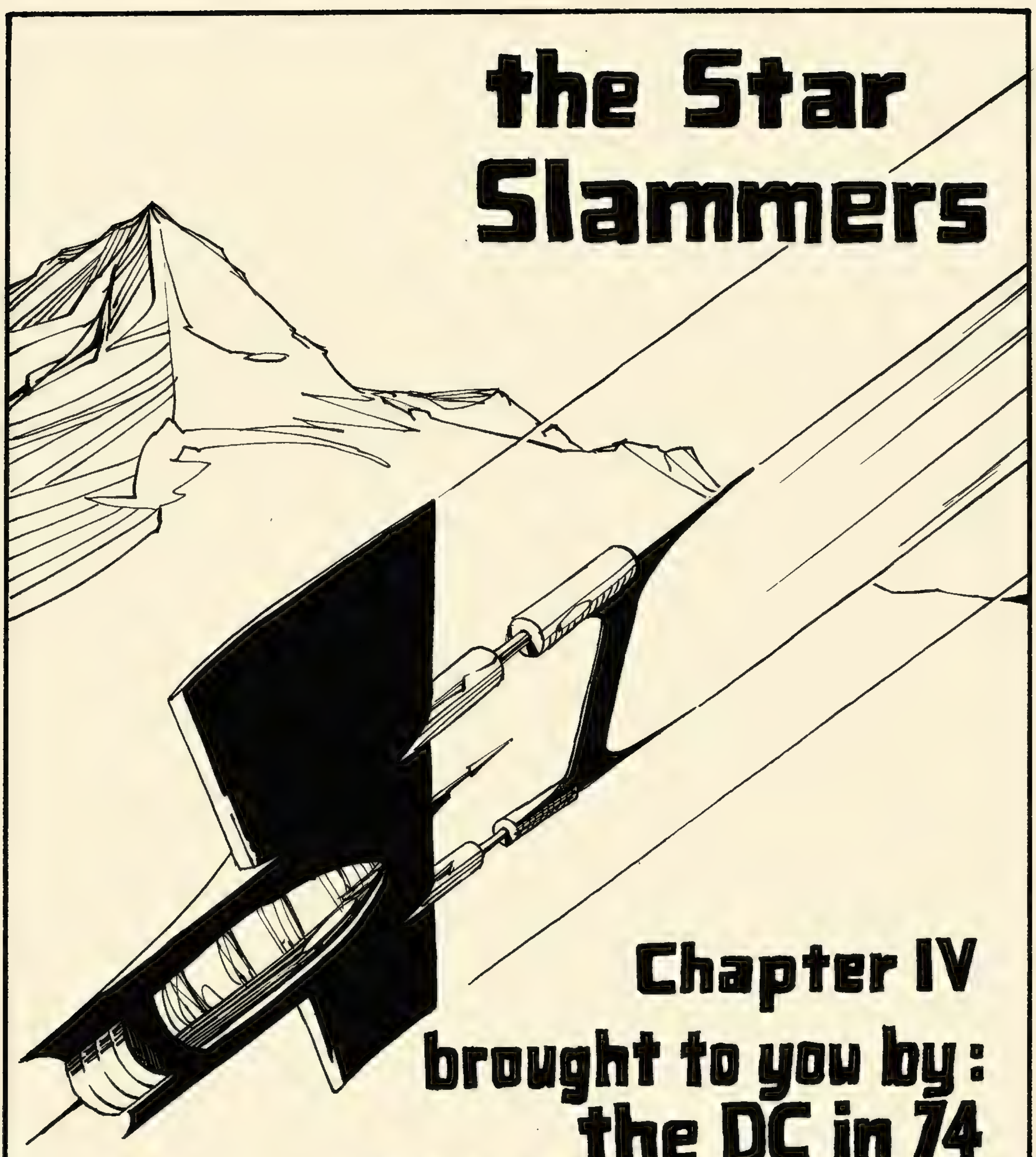
the Star Slammers



Chapter IV
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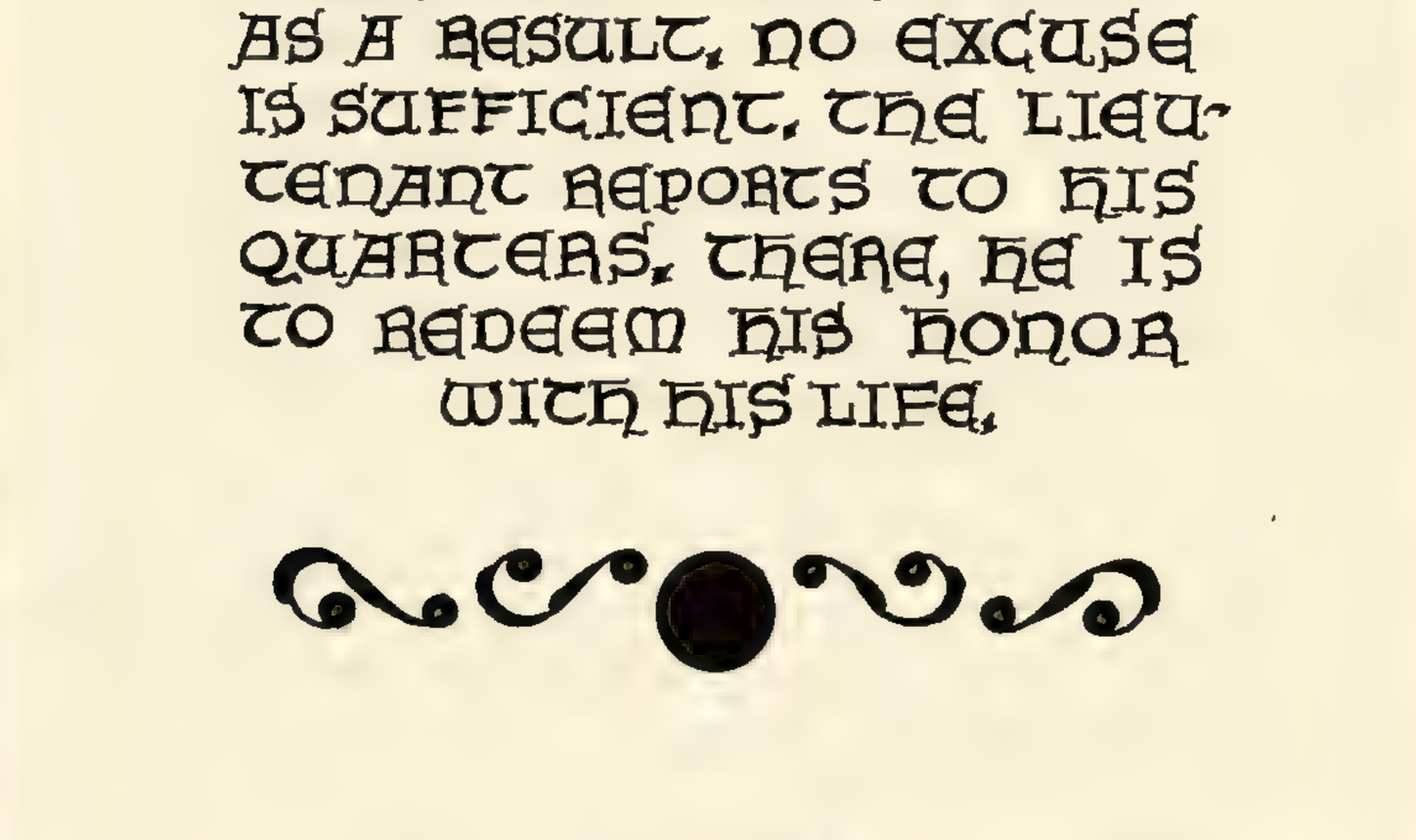
8.14.71

OUR STORY THUS FAR

IN '74, AN INTRAGALACTIC CONVENTION IS SCHEDULED TO BE HELD IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON DC ON EARTH. TO PREVENT THIS, THE NETHERWORLDS HAVE HIRED THE DREADED STAR SLAMMERS TO DESTROY THE CITY.

WITH THE SLAMMERS' ARMADA UNDERWAY FOR EARTH, A YOUNG LIEUTENANT BUNGLES HIS JOB AND TWO MAMMOTH TRANSPORT SHIPS ARE LOST AS A RESULT. NO EXCUSE IS SUFFICIENT. THE LIEUTENANT REPORTS TO HIS QUARTERS. THERE, HE IS TO REDEEM HIS HONOR WITH HIS LIFE.



AMONG THE STARS OF THE GALACTIC CENTER, THE BROKEN BONES OF FORMER CIVILIZATIONS LIE SCATTERED LIKE DUST. WARS HAVE RAGED THROUGH THE CORE LEAVING ONLY WRECKAGE BEHIND. YET THE STORM TIDES ARE RISING AGAIN. THE DESOLATE TOWERS TREMBLE AT THE THUNDER AND THE PASSING OF THE

STAR SLAMMERS

CYBERGRAPH SHOWS FLEET COURSE IS PERFECT, SIR. WE'LL BE PASSING GALACTIC CENTER IN A FEW MINUTES. HYPER-MASS CONCENTRATION IS PULLING US THROUGH LIKE A SLINGSHOT!

!!! ALPHA-60 - 2456
35-1756-8
CODE: 092

GOOD! WITH THE SPEED WE GAIN HERE, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO HIT EARTH ALMOST BEFORE SHE KNOWS WE'RE OUT!

MEANWHILE, BELOW DECKS...

SO NOW,

BECAUSE TWO STARSHIPS ARE GONE,

I GET ONE BULLET...

AND AN *HONORABLE* DEATH!

BULLSHIT!

DECK 7 LIFEBOATS

LIFEBOAT
13
EXPLOSIVE E

LIFEBOAT 131, SIR! IT'S EJECTED & DROPPED OUT OF HYPERSPACE! THE LIEUTENANT WHO BLEW UP THE TRANSPORT! HE'S KILLED A MAN, SIR!

MAINTAIN FLEET COURSE! DROP OUT A SPECTOR SQUADRON! GET HIM ALIVE IF POSSIBLE!

AND HAVE THE COMPUTORS RECALCULATE THE PROB-ABILITY OF A DOUBLECROSS IN VIEW OF THE LIEU-TENANT'S ESCAPE! MAYBE WE'RE BEING PLAYED FOR SUCKERS!

AND SHORTLY

THE REPORT, SIR. THE PROBABILITY'S INCREASED BUT THE COMPUTORS RECOMMEND NO ALTERATION OF OUR CURRENT PROGRAM. HERE ARE THE FIGURES.

UMM. NOTICEABLE BUT NOT SIGNIFICANT. VERY WELL. UNLESS SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENS, WE'LL CONTINUE THE MISSON AS SCHEDULED.

AND STAY IN CONTACT WITH THAT SQUADRON! I WANT TO KNOW THE INSTANT THEY FIND THAT **LIFEBOAT!**

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8-12-71

TO BE CONTINUED

DC in 14

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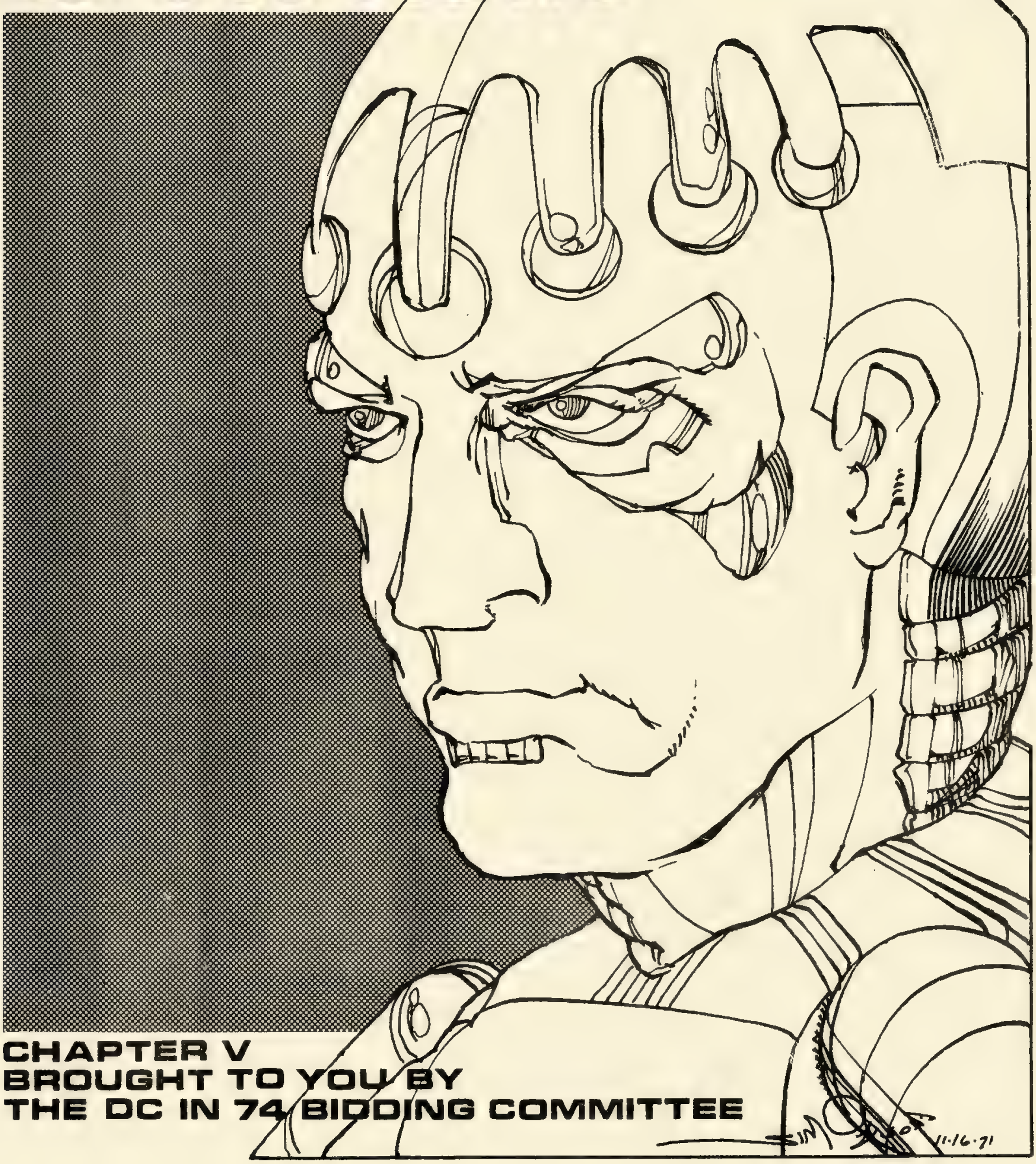

CHAPTER V
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NOVA

OUR STORY THUS FAR

IN '74 AN INTRAGALACTIC CONVENTION IS SCHEDULED TO BE HELD IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON DC ON EARTH. TO PREVENT THIS, THE NETHERWORLDS HAVE HIRED THE DREADED STAR SLAMMERS TO DESTROY THE CITY!!

WITH THE SLAMMERS' ARMADA WELL UNDERWAY FOR EARTH, A YOUNG LIEUTENANT FLEES THE CONSEQUENCES OF A TREACHEROUS ACT BY PIRATING A LIFEBOAT. A SPECTOR SQUADRON GIVES CHASE.

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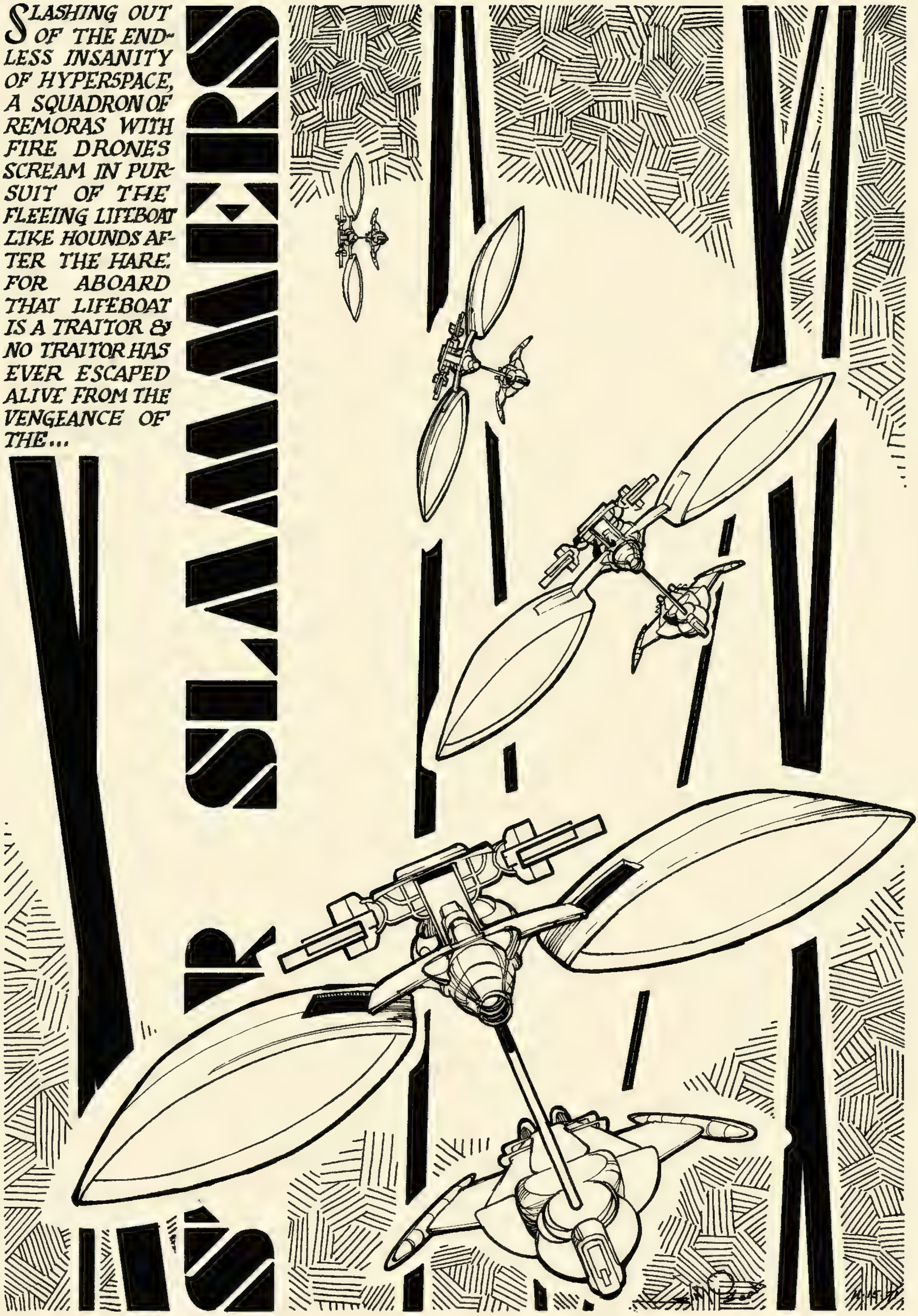
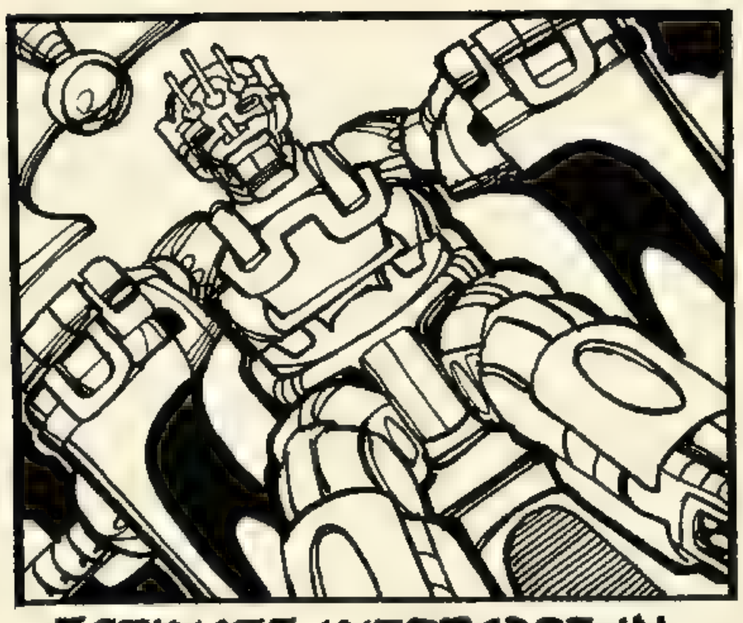
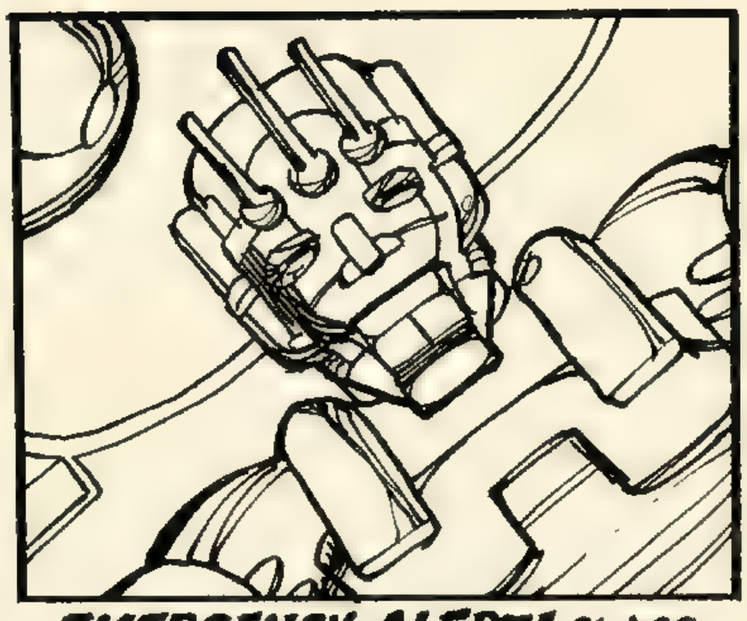
SLASHING OUT OF THE ENDLESS INSANITY OF HYPERSPACE, A SQUADRON OF REMORAS WITH FIRE DRONES SCREAM IN PURSUIT OF THE FLEEING LIFEBOAT LIKE HOUNDS AFTER THE HARE. FOR ABOARD THAT LIFEBOAT IS A TRAITOR & NO TRAITOR HAS EVER ESCAPED ALIVE FROM THE VENGEANCE OF THE...

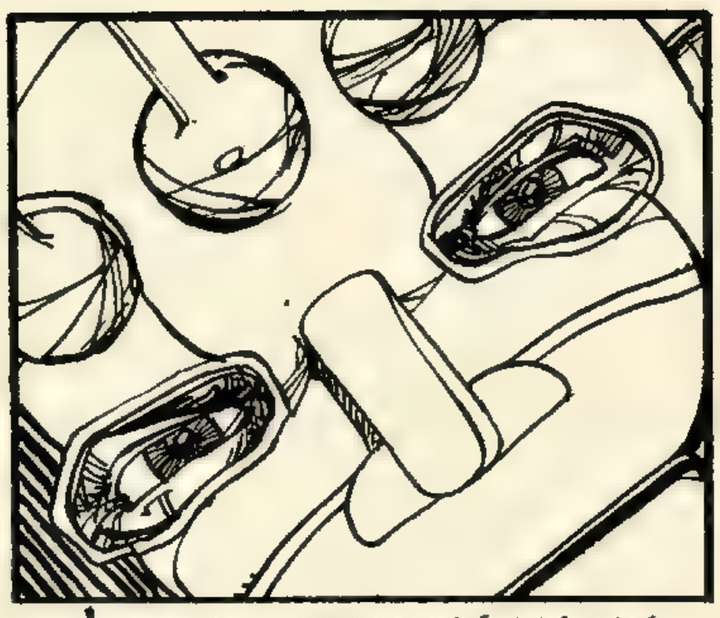




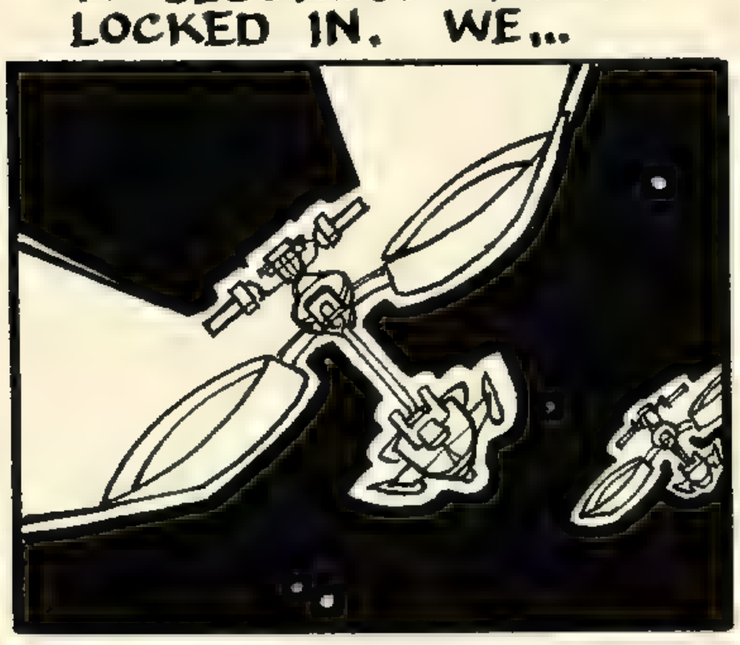
ESTIMATE INTERCEPT IN 90 SECONDS. TARGET LOCKED IN. WE...

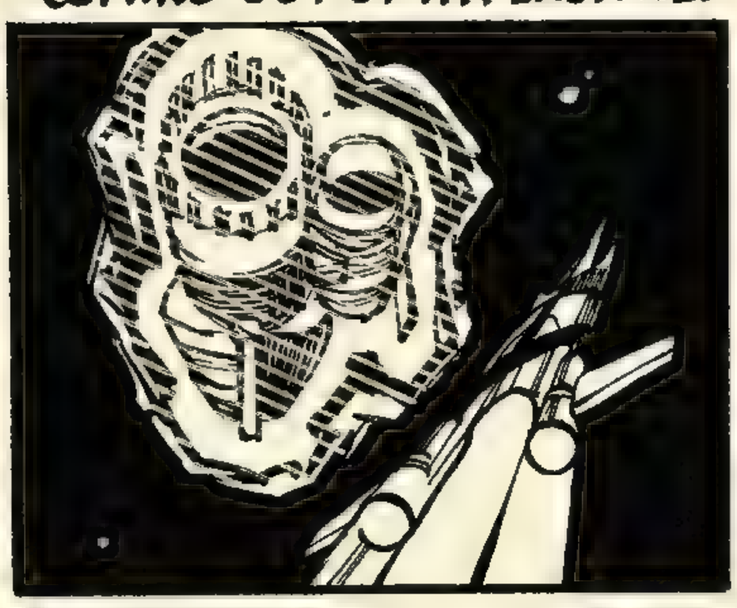


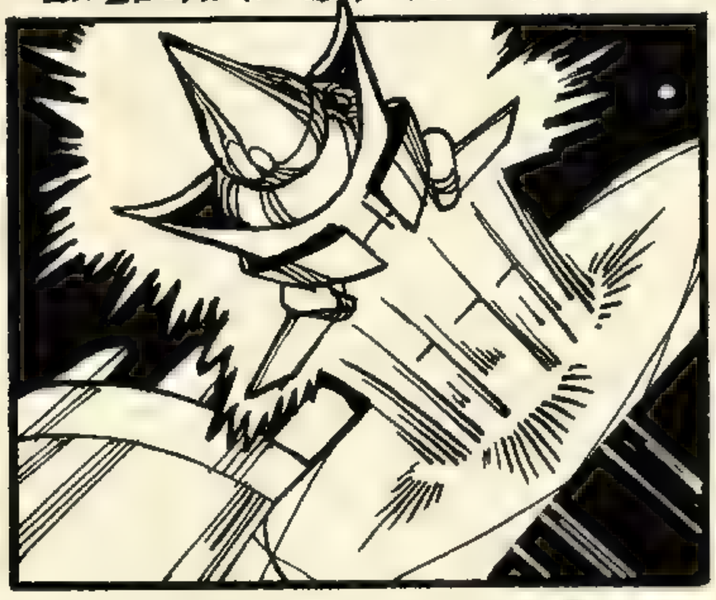
EMERGENCY ALERT! CLASS 'A' INTERFERENCE! SOMETHING'S COMING OUT OF HYPERSPACE!



IT'S A RENDEZVOUS! AN UNMARKED SHIP'S PULLING THE LIFEBOAT IN & FIRING AT US!



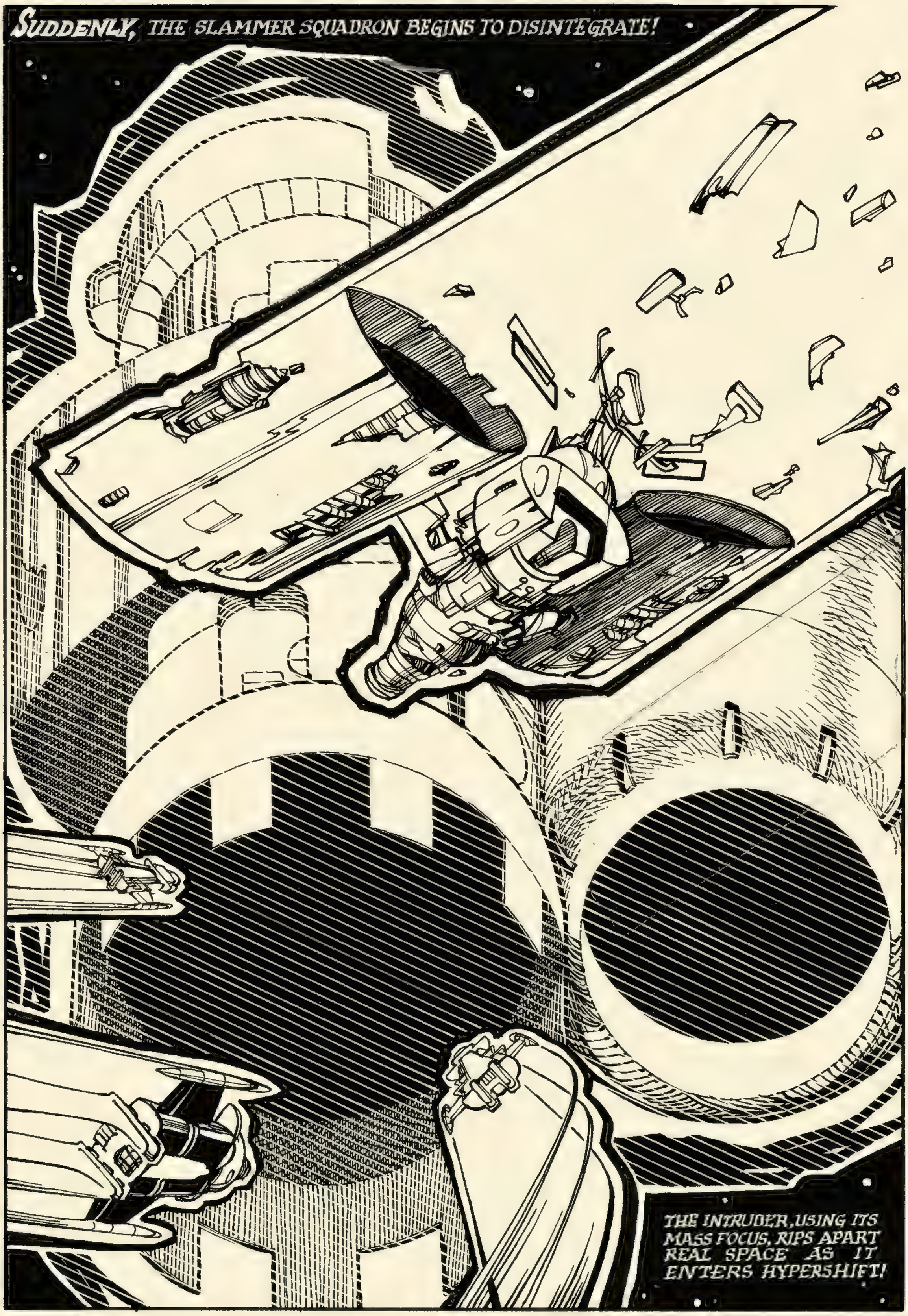


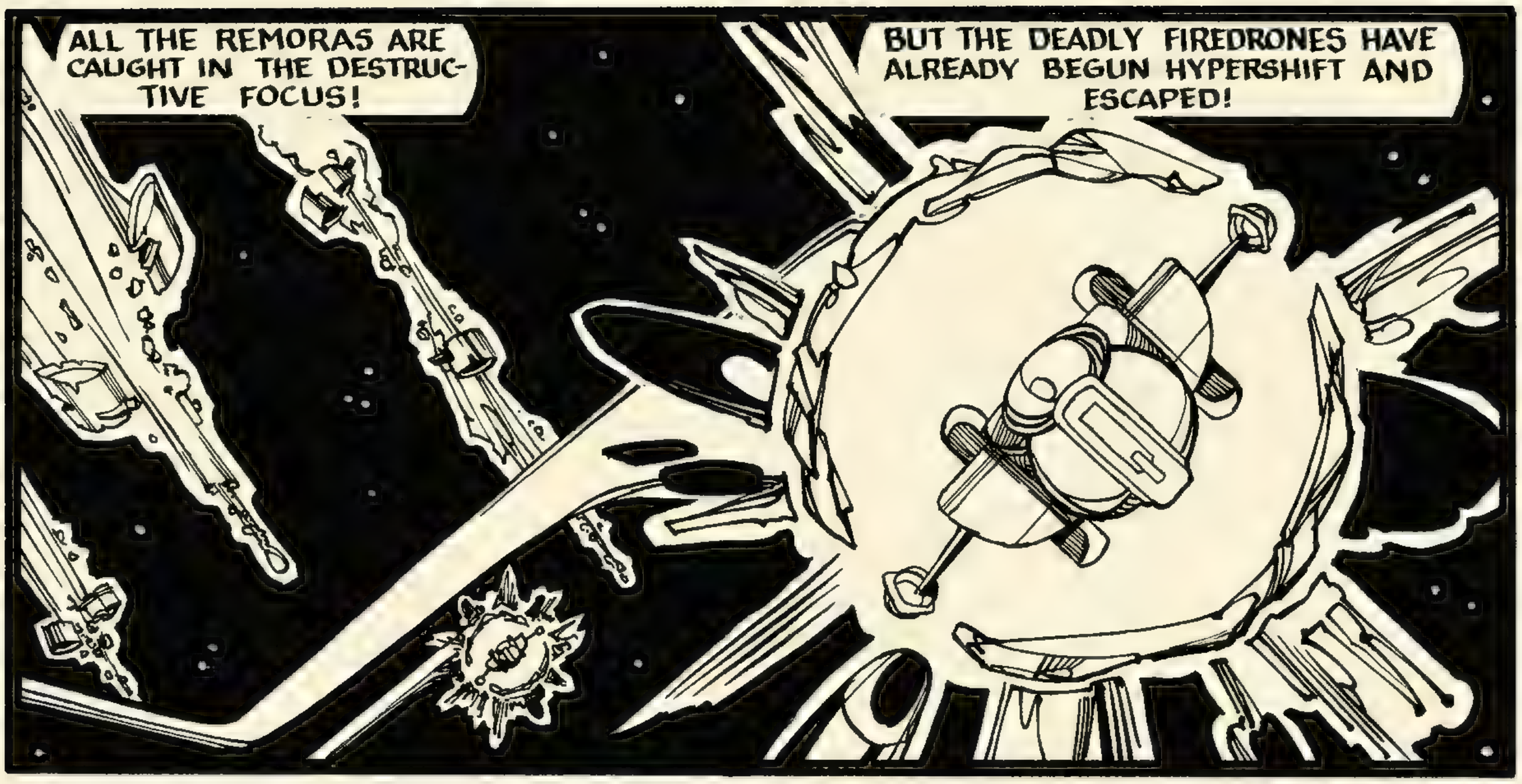


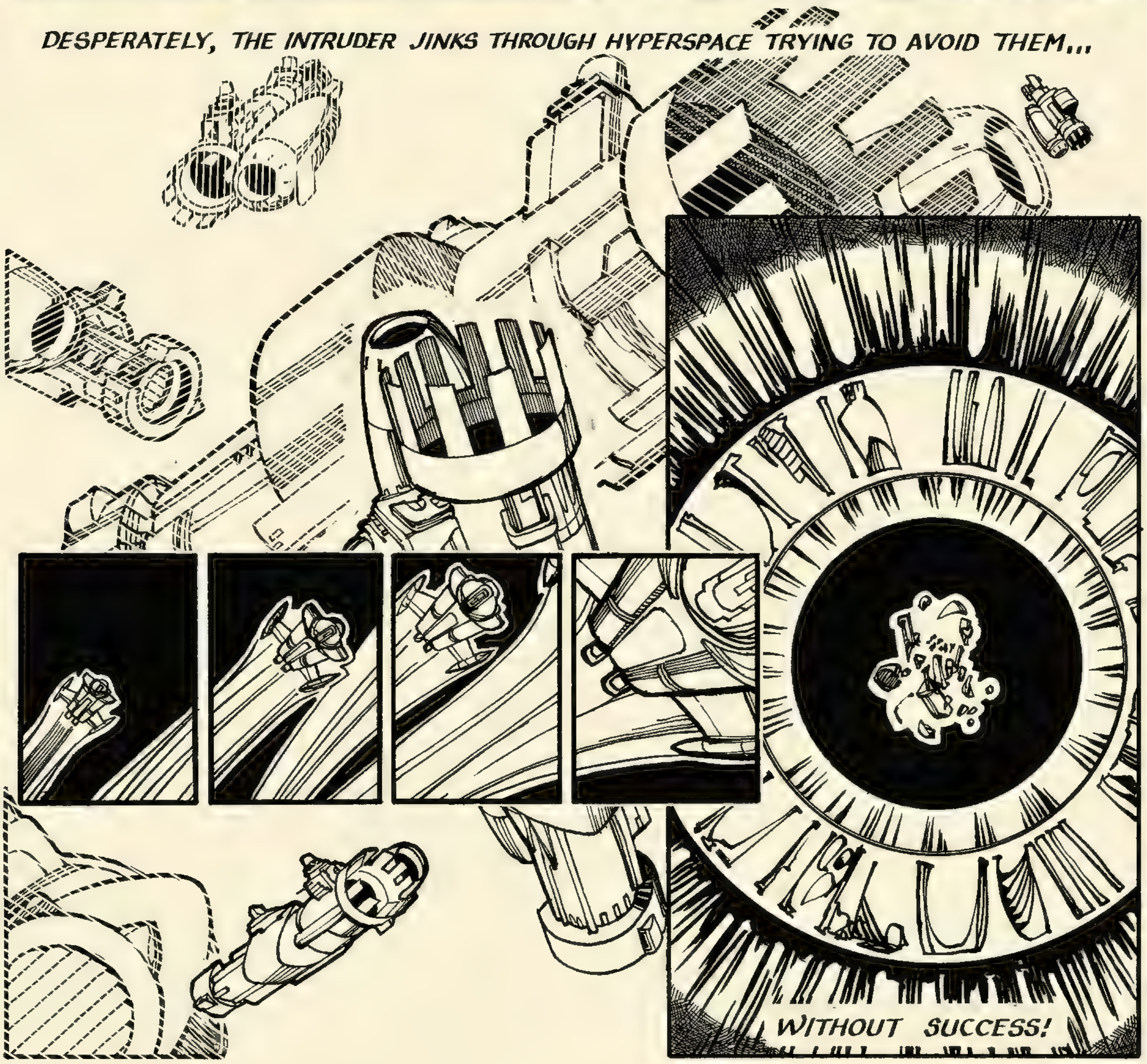
The **INTRUDER** has locked in lifeboat

and is initiating Hypershift!!!

CANCEL PREVIOUS ORDERS!!!
Go for Destruct!!
GO FOR DESTRUCT!!


SUDDENLY, THE SLAMMER SQUADRON BEGINS TO DISINTEGRATE!
THE INTRUDER, USING ITS MASS FOCUS, RIPS APART REAL SPACE AS IT ENTERS HYPERSHIFT!


ALL THE REMORAS ARE CAUGHT IN THE DESTRUC-TIVE FOCUS!
BUT THE DEADLY FIREDRONES HAVE ALREADY BEGUN HYPERSHIFT AND ESCAPED!
19


DESPERATELY, THE INTRUDER JINKS THROUGH HYPERSPACE TRYING TO AVOID THEM...
WITHOUT SUCCESS!

CONTACT!

ALL DRONE MONITORS HAVE BLOWN!

THEY GOT HIM! FINAL MONITOR TAPES SHOW A COMPLETE DESTRUCT!

AND EVERY MAN LOST! HAVE A *THOROUGH* ANALYSIS MADE OF THE MONITOR REPORTS!

I WANT THE IDENTITY OF THAT SHIP!

COMPUTORS! *INITIATE PROBABLE FUTURES PROGRAMMING WITH ALTERNATIVE IDENTIFICATIONS FOR THE INTRUDER. CHART RECOMMENDED COURSES OF ACTION FOR EACH I.D.!*

COMMANDER! WEB OUTPOSTS REPORT SIX HOURS TO EARTHSPACE SHIFT!

VERY WELL! PREPARE TO BREAK FLEET DOWN TO COMBAT STATIONS!

& SEE THAT ALL *SILVER MIND* CHANNELS ARE CLEARED & READY.

~TO BE CONTINUED~

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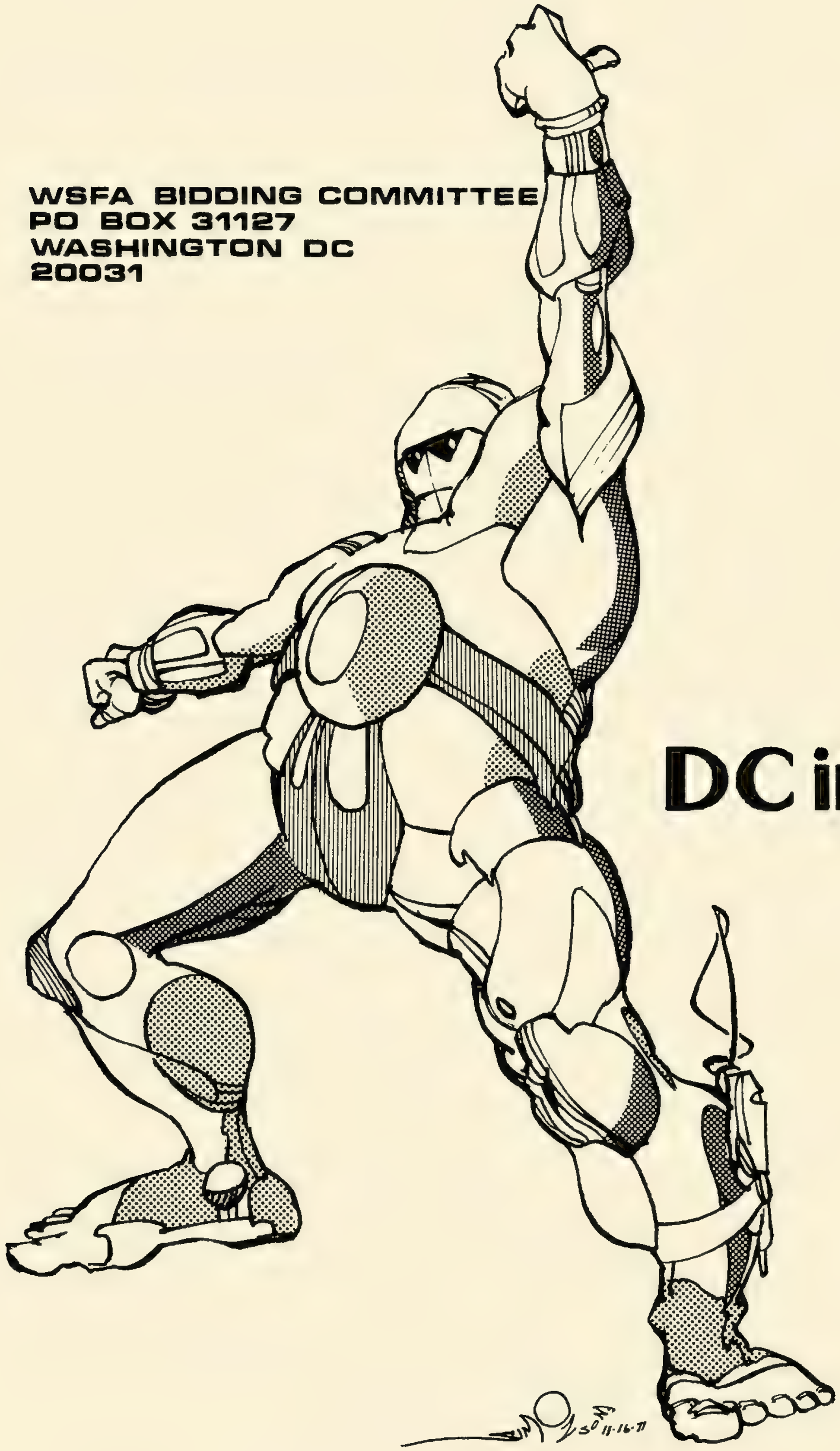
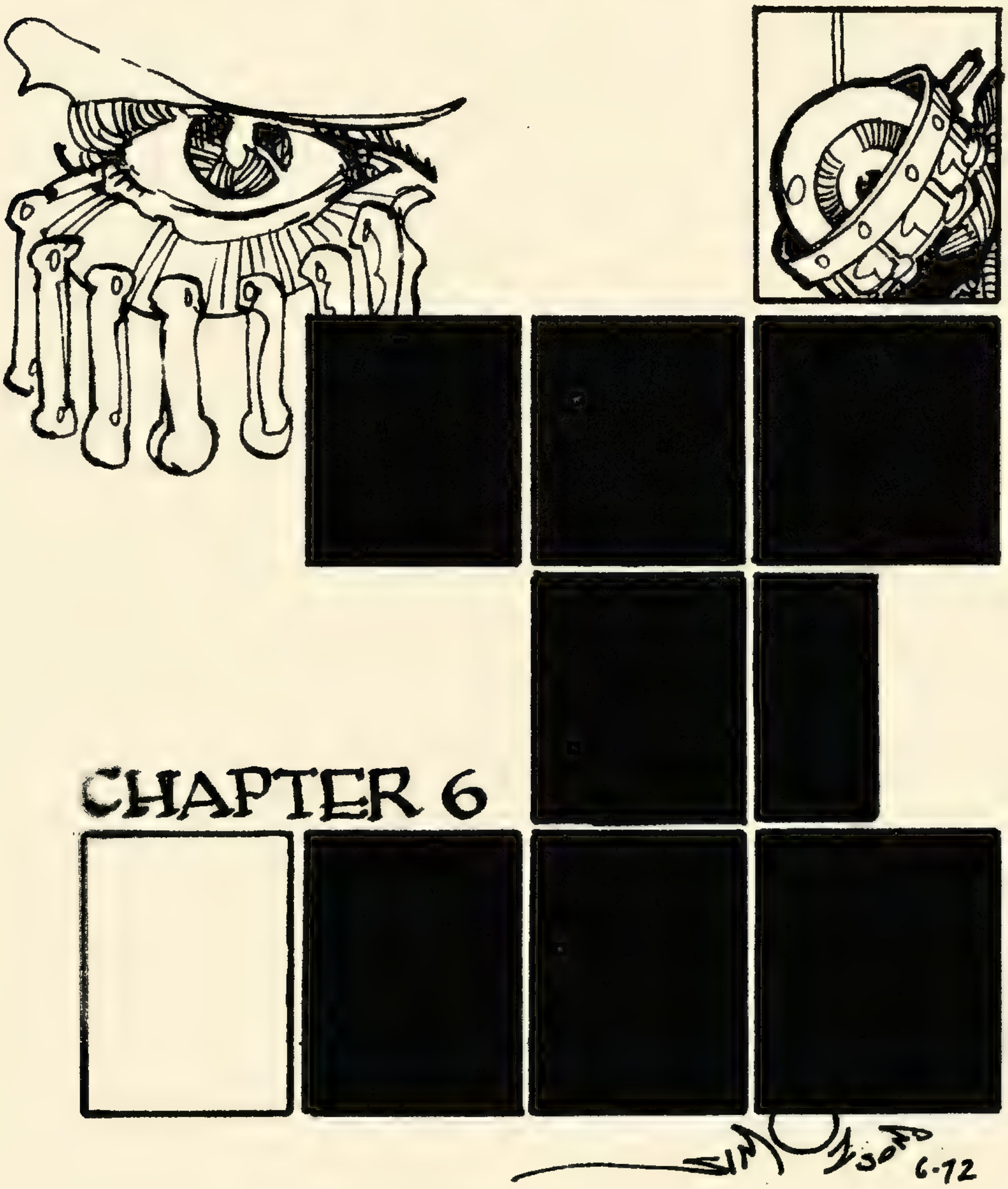


DC in 74

THE D.C. IN '74
BIDDING COMMITTEE

PRESENTS

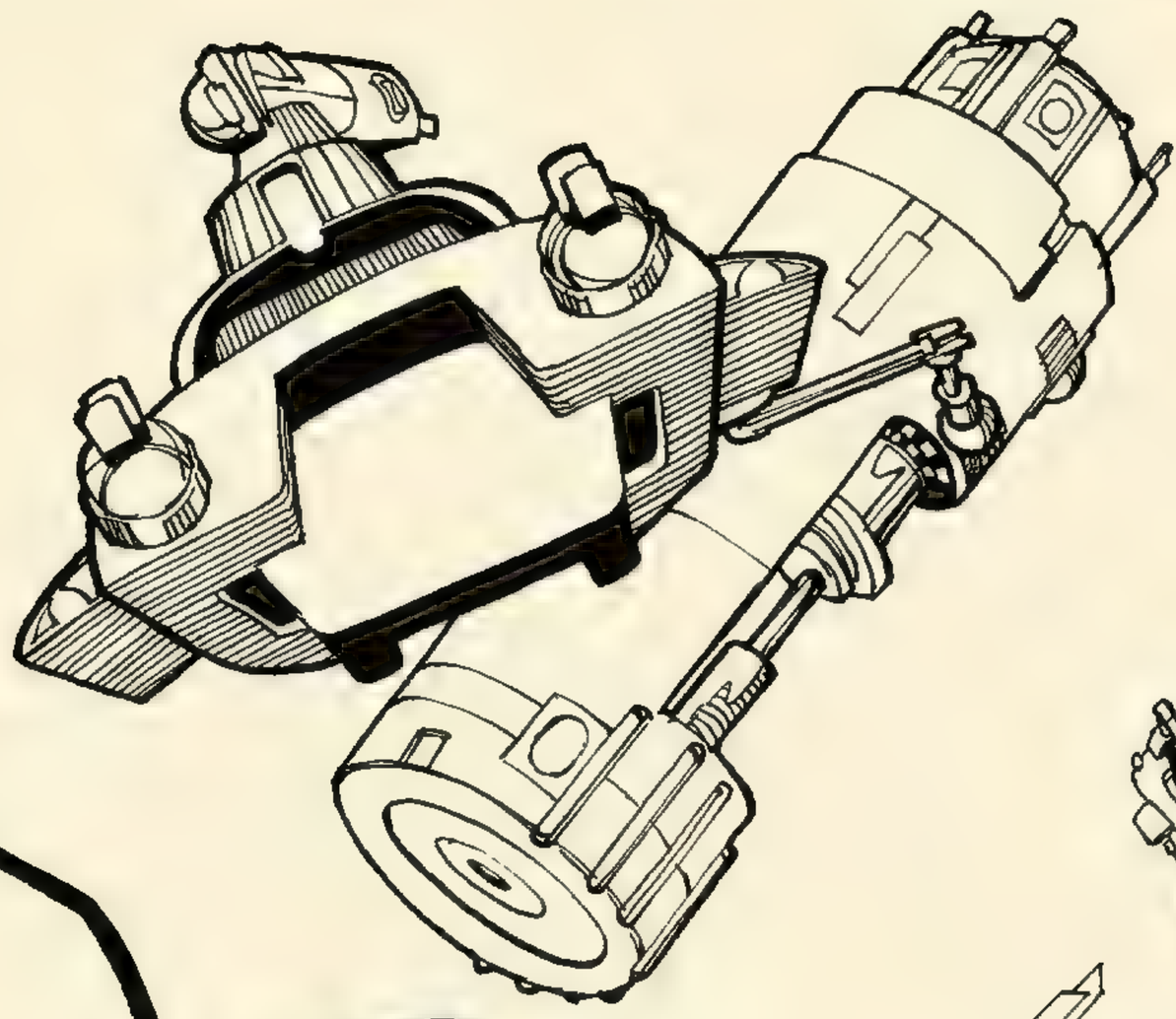
THE STAR SLAMMERS

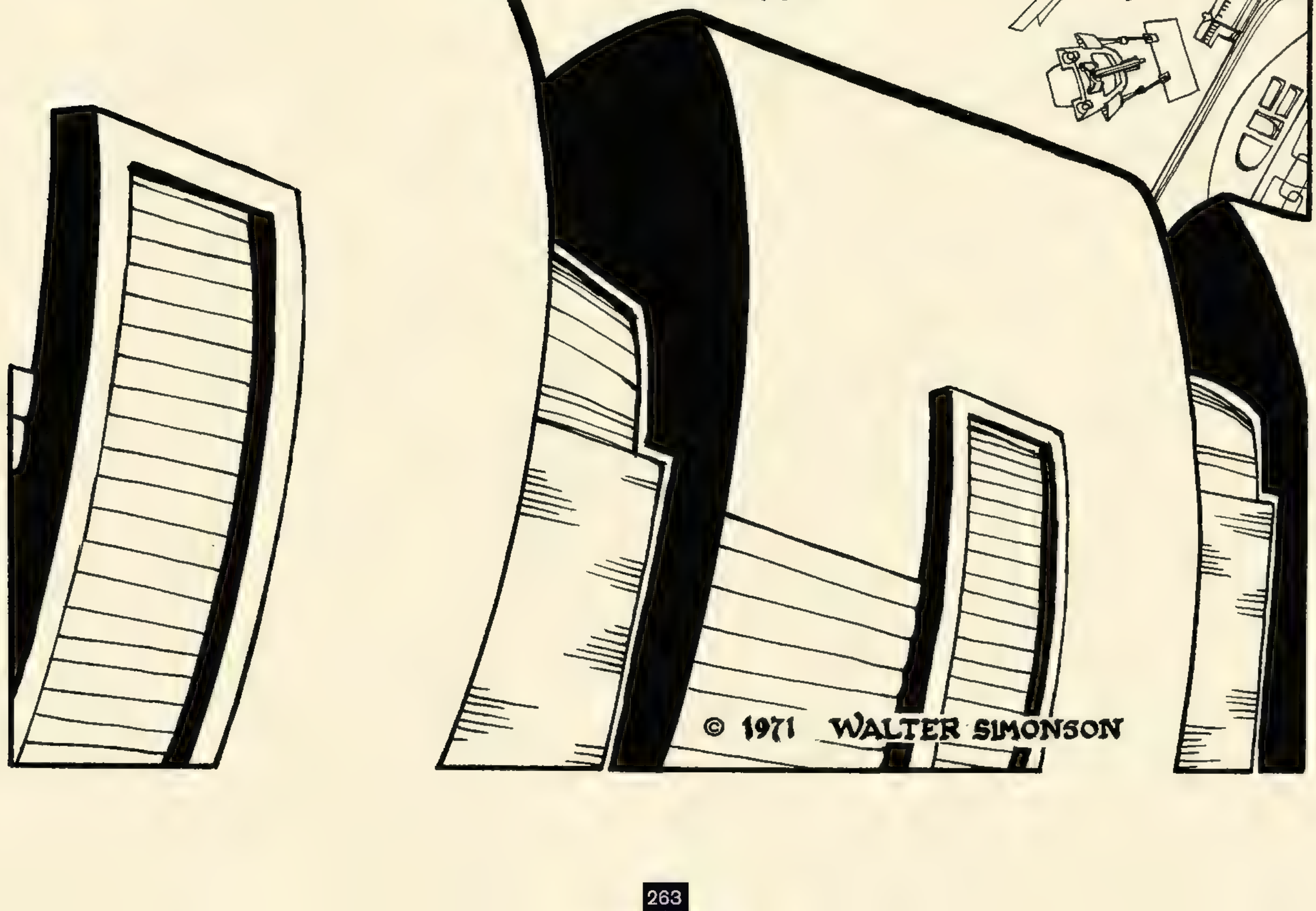


CHAPTER 6

IN '74, AN INTRAGALACTIC CONVENTION IS SCHEDULED TO BE HELD IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON DC ON EARTH. TO PREVENT THIS, THE NETHERWORLDS HAVE HIRED THE DREADED STAR SLAMMERS TO DESTROY THE CITY!

WITH THE SLAMMERS' ARMADA CLOSE AT LAST TO EARTHSPACE, THE FLEET HALTS. BEHIND THE PROTECTION OF THE D-SHIELDS, MAMMOTH RECONSTRUCTION OPERATIONS GO ON. THE GIANT TRANSPORTS ARE BROKEN DOWN, AND GIANT WARSHIPS ARE ASSEMBLED IN THEIR PLACE! THE ENERGY CONFIGURATIONS FOR TRAVEL BECOME THE ENERGY CONFIGURATIONS FOR WAR, THE MIGHTY JUGGERNAUTS OF...





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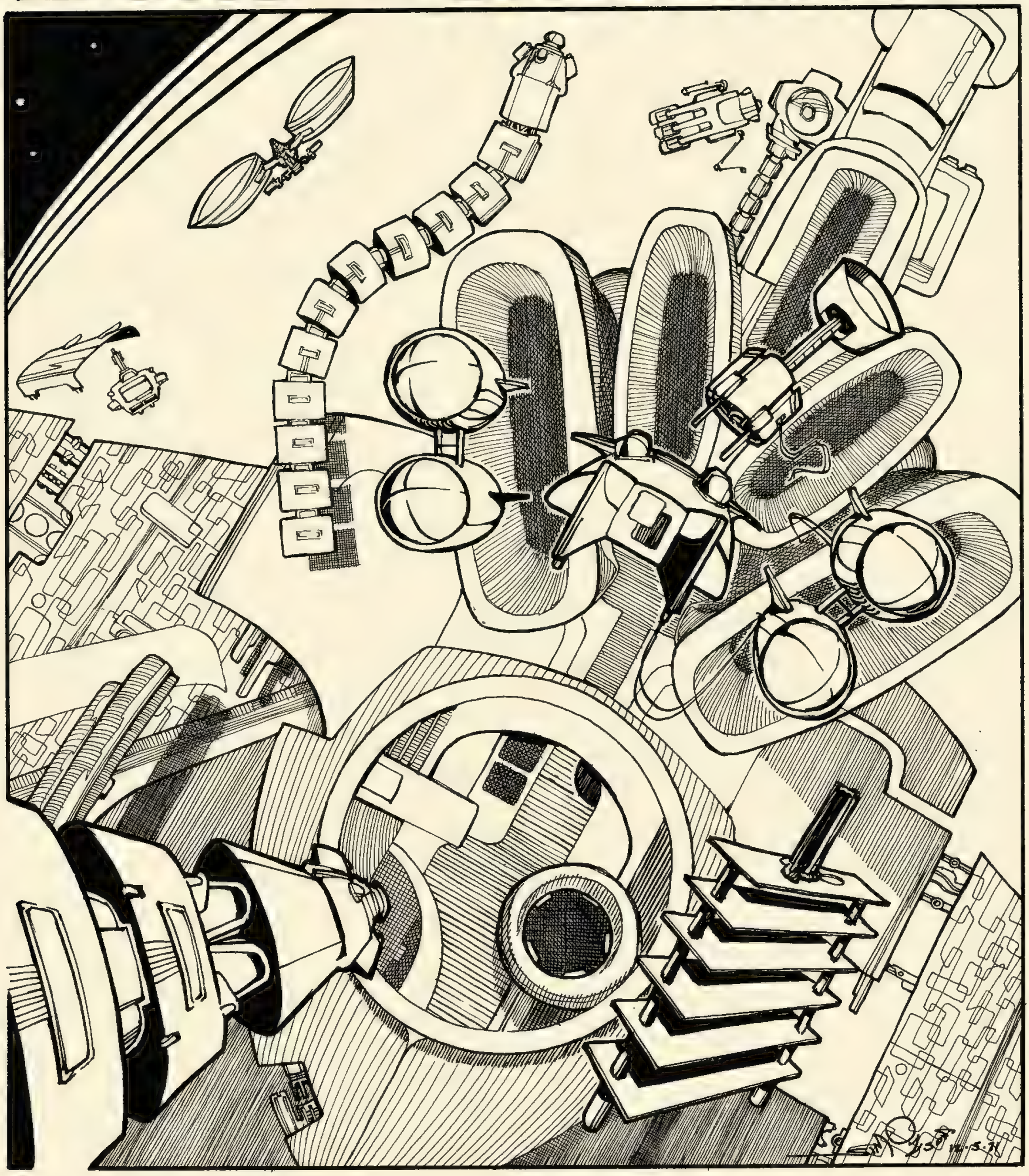
the Star Slammers



ALL FLEET ALERT!
FULL ALERT!
D·SHIELD PENETRATION
D·SHIELD PENETRATION
SECURE ALL STATIONS
SECURE ALL STATIONS

EARTH SHIPS, SIR! SMALL HARRIERS. TOO SMALL TO HAVE MADE IT THIS FAR OUT UNSUPPORTED!

THEN THERE'S GOT TO BE A MOTHER SHIP AROUND SOMEWHERE. SHE MAY BE HIDING IN HYPERSPACE BUT THERE OUGHT TO BE SOME TRACE. ALERT THE WEB!

WHAT'S THE REFLEX PURSUIT STATUS?

COMPLETELY OPERATIONAL, SIR. THEY'VE GOTTEN THEM ALL. OTHERS ARE MATERIALIZING BUT THEY'RE BEING NEUTRALIZED AS THEY PHASE IN.

WE'LL HAVE TO FIND THAT MOTHER! SHE MAY EVEN BE MANUFACTURING THESE DAMN THINGS!

EARTH HAS BEEN WARNED OF OUR APPROACH!

THANKS, CHIEF!

STILL, IT IS A DISCONCERTING THOUGHT! SOMEBODY KNOWS MORE ABOUT WHAT WE'RE DOING THAN WE DO!

WHAT'S THE WEB REPORT?

NEGATIVE, SIR!

NEGATIVE, SIR!

THAT'S NO GOOD! MAYBE THE MOTHER'S NOT OUT THERE. WEB WOULDN'T PICK HER UP IF SHE WERE PHASED OUT ALONG THE D-SHIELD PERIMETER! BRING THE SCREEN IN TO MINIMUM COVER!

THERE IT IS, SIR!

YES SIR!

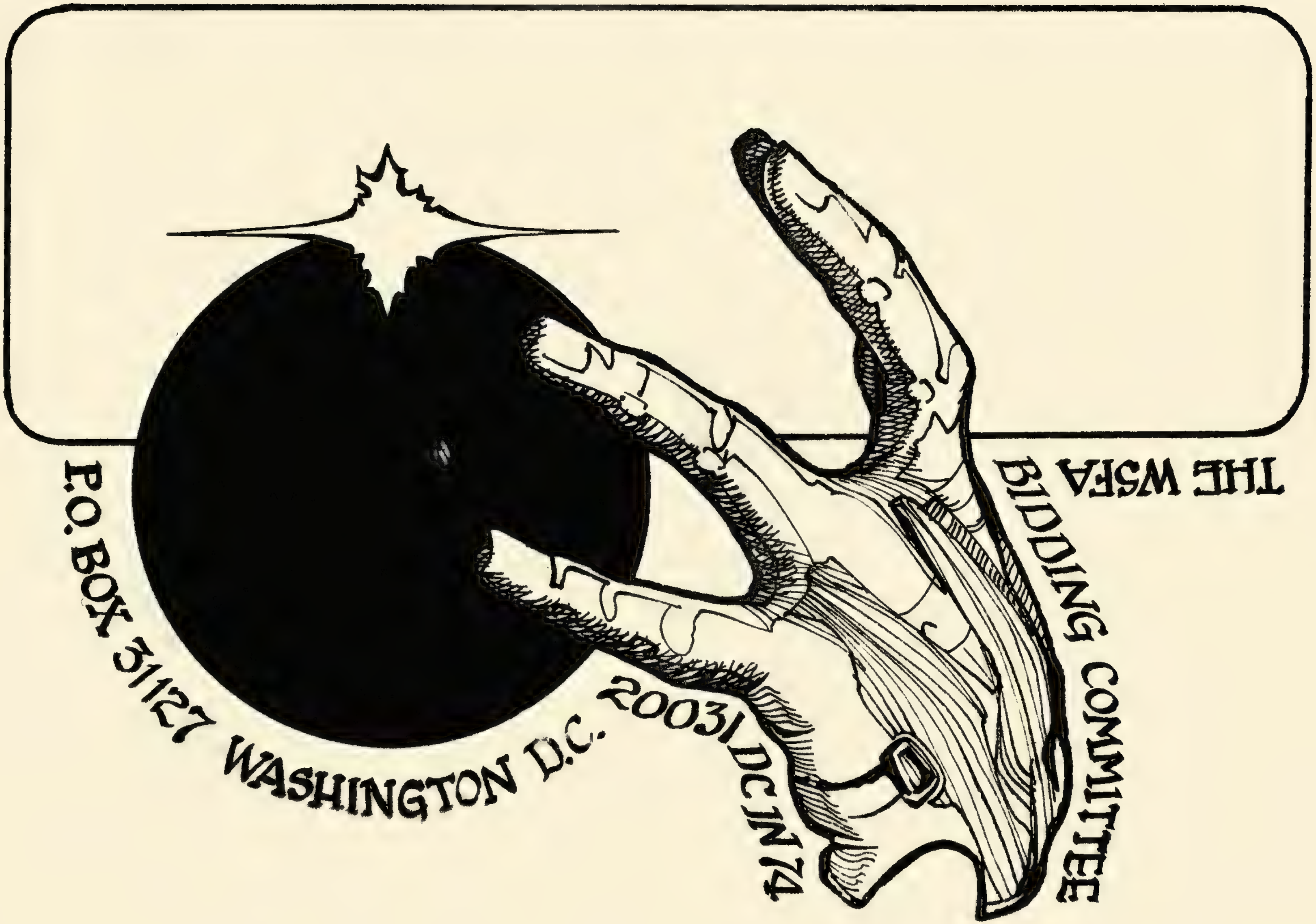
Click!

GOOD! NOTIFY THE FLEET. I WANT IT COMPLETED & MOVING IN 6 HOURS! EARTH KNOWS WE'RE COMING BUT SHE HASN'T HAD MUCH WARNING OR ELSE WE'D HAVE MET MORE THAN HARRIERS!

LET ME HAVE ALL PROBABLE FUTURES PROGRAMMING WHEN IT'S FINISHED. MAYBE THE COMPUTORS HAVE ENOUGH DATA NOW TO TELL US WHO WE'RE REALLY FIGHTING!

SHIFT TO SILVERMIND CONTROL AS SOON AS WE'RE MOVING. COMBAT ALERT FROM HERE IN!

TO BE CONTINUED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THE STAR SLAMMERS EPISODE 7

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DC in 74

THIS IS THE SILVER MIND! BURIED IN THE HEART OF THE STAR SLAMMER'S HOMEWORLD, IT ENABLES THEM TO ARTIFICIALLY CREATE A "HIVE MIND" WITH INSTANT COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ALL MEMBERS, THE MEANS TO NEAR PERFECT CO-ORDINATION IN BATTLE! IT IS ONE OF THE TWO REASONS WHY THE STAR SLAMMERS HAVE SO FAR PROVEN TO BE UNBEATABLE. THE OTHER REASON IS THAT THERE IS A PLANET-FULL OF BESERKER STAR SLAMMERS!

LIGHTNING FLICKERS ACROSS THE SKY; THE WINDS HOWL OVER THE FIELDS & VALLEYS; AND RIDING THE HYPERSHIFT TO EARTH COME THE **STAR SLAMMERS!**

ALL UNITS!

ALL UNITS! THIS IS THE COMMANDER!

SHIFT TO SILVERMIND CONTROL!

SHIFT TO SILVERMIND!

RIDE THE ***FIRESTORM!***

AS THE STAR SLAMMERS SEND THEIR THOUGHTS THROUGH THE SILVERMIND,

SO THE SILVERMIND EXPANDS THE RANGE OF THEIR PERCEPTIONS THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE FLEET!

SECONDS LATER, A WING OF FAST FIGHTER BOMBERS DETACHES ITSELF FROM THE

MAIN FLEET AND MOVES SWIFTLY TOWARDS WASHINGTON D.C.

MOONWATCH OMEGA 3

CONFIRMED! HOSTILE FLEET OUT OF HYPERSHIFT! TARGET WASHINGTON! INTERCEPTORS... LOOSE!!

EARTH WORLDS DEFENSE

FLASHING OUT FROM THE NORTHERN HEMISPHERE COME SQUADRON AFTER SQUADRON OF INTERCEPTORS RACING TO CATCH THE BOMBERS!

WHILE ABOARD THE RAIDERS...

WE HAVE INTER-CEPTORS ON PLOT!

DIVERT COURSE, COMPUTOR COORDINATES ...

... TO ROCKY MOUNTAINS OVERFLIGHT!

THIRD ATTACK SEQUENCE!

RRRROOOOAAAARRRR

BUT DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE ROCKIES,...

CORE TAP COMPLETE!

FUSION CONTROL ALPHA-GO!

TRACKING SYSTEMS LOCKED IN!

1

2

ALL SYSTEMS GREEN!

FIRE!

...AND BOILING UP OUT OF THE EARTH WITH THE FURY OF SOLAR HYDROGEN STORMS, A RAGING INFERNO SLICES THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE, VAPORIZING EVERYTHING IN ITS PATH!

TO BE CONCLUDED

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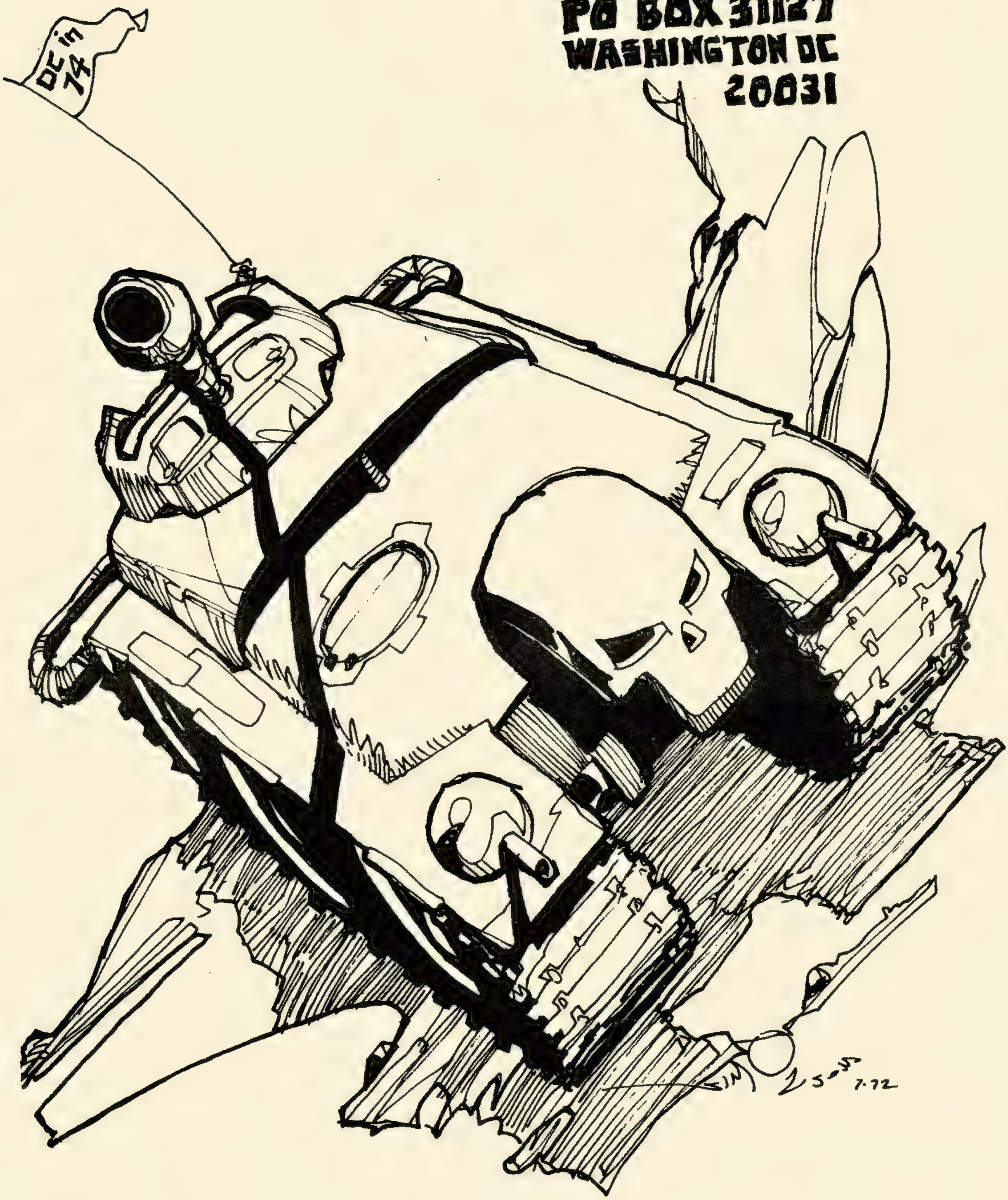

THUNDERING OUT OF THE EARTH, A FIERY STREAM OF PLASMA THREATENS TO ENGULF THE ENTIRE FLEET OF THE...

STAR SLAMMERS

CONCLUSION

NAVIGATION, LOCK TO PRIME COMPUTOR! SECOND ORDER, RANDOM NUMBER JUMP! INITIATE HYPERSHIFT!

GO!

AND AS THE STAR SLAMMERS SHIFT AWAY FROM EARTHSPACE,

SILVERMINDED THOUGHTS OF THE COMMANDER BLANKET THE FLEET!

EIGHT *SCIMITARS* ARE TO SHIFT TO WASHINGTON *AT ONCE!*

BUT COMMANDER, THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO MATERIALIZE INSIDE EARTH'S GRAVITY WELL!

WITH LIGHT PAYLOADS, THE SHIPS WILL HAVE A 30/30 CHANCE!

VOLUNTEERS ONLY.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

THEY ARE TO PROCEED WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF WASHINGTON WHILE WE DRAW FIRE!

MOMENTS LATER,

EIGHT SCIMITARS

SHIFT TO EARTH...

...THREE SURVIVE!

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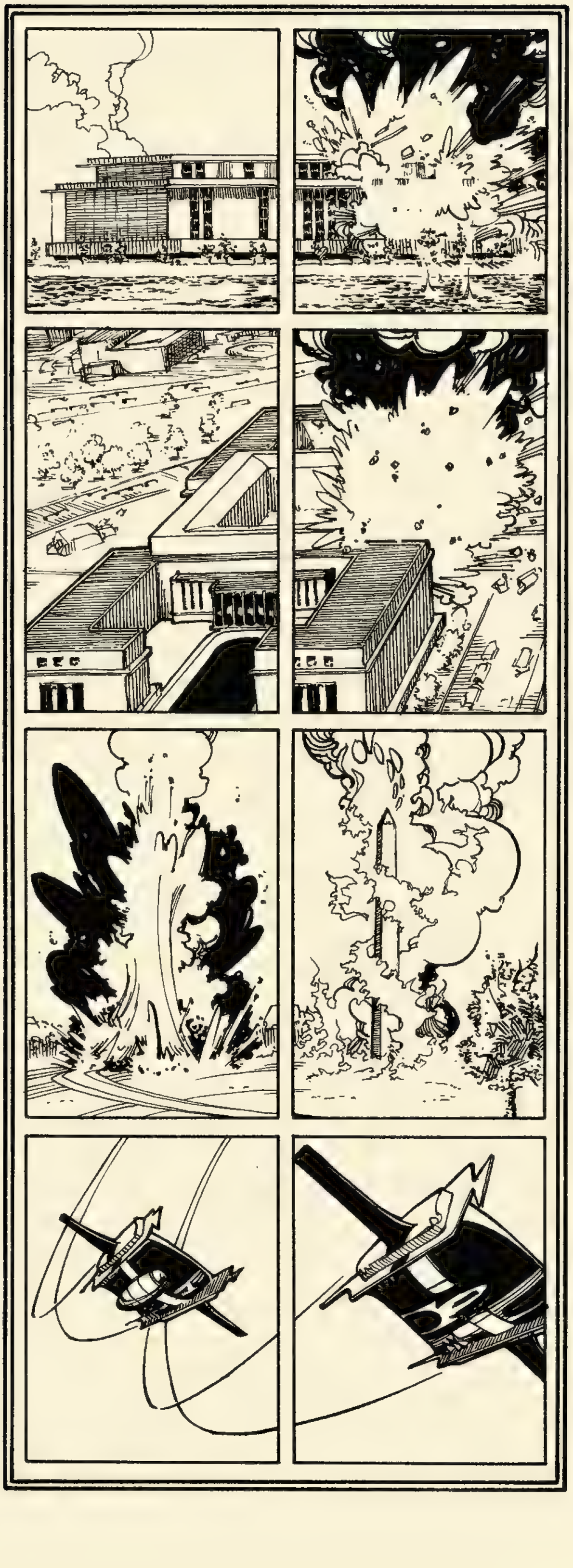
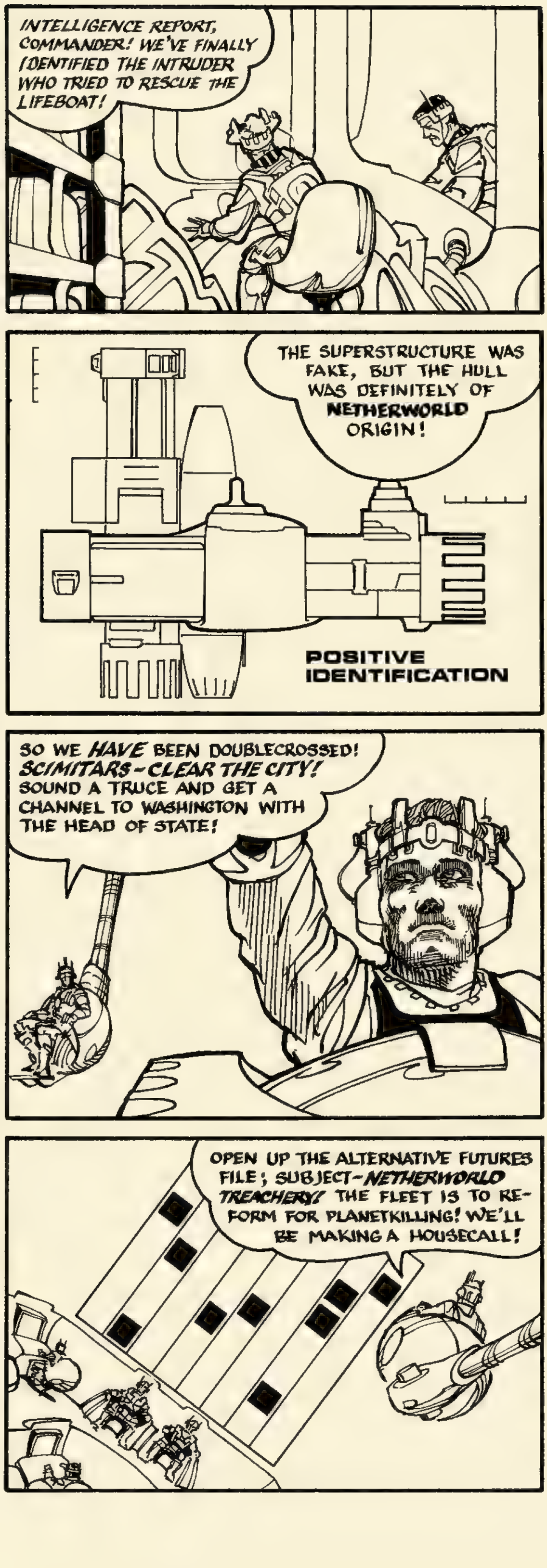



INTELLIGENCE REPORT, COMMANDER! WE'VE FINALLY IDENTIFIED THE INTRUDER WHO TRIED TO RESCUE THE LIFEBOAT!
THE SUPERSTRUCTURE WAS FAKE, BUT THE HULL WAS DEFINITELY OF NETHERWORLD ORIGIN!
POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION
SO WE HAVE BEEN DOUBLECROSSED! SCIMITARS - CLEAR THE CITY! SOUND A TRUCE AND GET A CHANNEL TO WASHINGTON WITH THE HEAD OF STATE!
OPEN UP THE ALTERNATIVE FUTURES FILE; SUBJECT - NETHERWORLD TREACHERY! THE FLEET IS TO REFORM FOR PLANETKILLING! WE'LL BE MAKING A HOUSECALL!

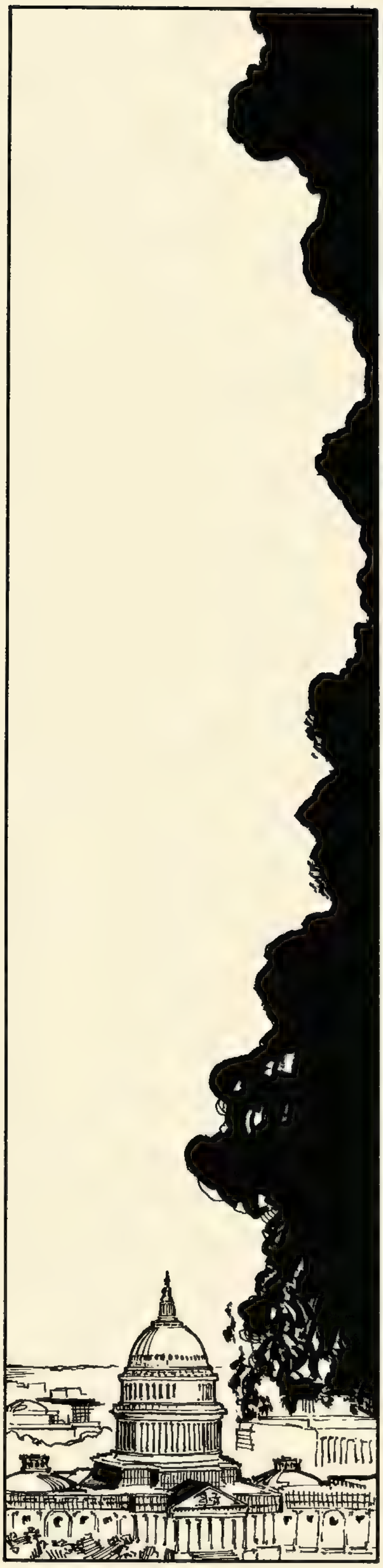
WE'VE GOT CONTACT WITH *WASHINGTON, SIR!*

I AM *RUTHVEN SCHEYTT!* PRESIDING OFFICER OF THE SENATE! WHY HAVE YOU CALLED A TRUCE? IS YOUR JOB FINISHED OR DO YOU WISH TO *SURRENDER?*

WE CAN SPARE THE SARCASM. THIS IS THE COMMANDER OF THE *STAR SLAMMERS!* WE HAVE ONLY JUST DISCOVERED THAT OUR EMPLOYER HAS **BETRAYED US!**

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR *EARTH?*

A REPRIEVE FOR THE REMAINDER OF YOUR CITY, MS. PRESIDENT!



WE ARE PREPARED TO MAKE RESTITUTION OF *SIX MILLION* FOR THE PROPERTY ALREADY LOST! AND A COPY OF THE CONTRACT THAT BROUGHT US HERE ORIGINALLY!

WHAT ABOUT THE DEAD?

REGRETABLE BUT *IRREPLACABLE*, SHALL WE SAY, STANDARD PENSIONS FOR ALL SURVIVORS?

AND THAT'S THE END OF IT?

IT IS. IF YOU WISH PROTECTION WHILE YOU'RE RE-BUILDING, WE'LL PROVIDE THAT AS WELL.

SO ALL WILL BE AS IT WAS. WE'LL *CONSIDER* THE OFFER OF PROTECTION. THE OTHERS ARE **ACCEPTABLE**.

THEN FAREWELL. A PROPER DIPLOMATIC MISSION WILL BE SENT TO EARTH SHORTLY.

WE TOOK A MIND PRINT OF MR. FARRAGUT WHILE HE WAS ON HOMEWORLD. IS IT ABOARD NOW?

YES, SIR!

FEED IT TO THE BRAIN BURNERS AND HOLD IT FOR THE PROPER SIGNAL! ALERT THE FLEET! TRAVELING GEAR IN ONE HOUR!

SHORTLY THEREAFTER, THE NETHERWORLD COUNCIL IS IN EMERGENCY SESSION!

HAS ANYTHING FURTHER BEEN HEARD FROM *EARTH!*

NO! THE SLAMMERS HAD BEGUN TO DESTROY THE CITY WHEN FOR NO APPARENT REASON, THEY *STOPPED!*

DAMMIT!

WITH A WAR BETWEEN THE EARTHWORLDS AND THE STAR SLAMMERS, WE WOULD HAVE HAD THEM BOTH! THE SLAMMERS WOULD HAVE BEATEN EARTH, AND **WE** COULD HAVE BEATEN THEM! TO STEP INTO BOTH THE MILITARY AND ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP OF THE GALAXY! FARRAGUT, YOU SAW THEM. WOULD THE STAR SLAMMERS BREAK A CONTRACT?

I CAN ANSWER THAT, MR. CHAIRMAN! A PLEASURE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, MR. FARRAGUT, ANY CONTRACT GIVEN IN GOOD FAITH IS ACCEPTED IN GOOD FAITH.

COMMANDER!

YOU'VE COST US A GREAT DEAL, COUNSELORS! ... NOW, WE ARE GOING TO COST *YOU!*

YOU'LL FIND YOU CAN'T CALL OUT. THE CHAMBER'S BEEN *ISOLATED!*

ZAAAAAK!

MY *APOLOGIES*, SIR FOR THIS UNPROVOKED ATTACK! THE MAN WILL BE PUNISHED!

WISHFUL THINKING, MR CHAIRMAN. YOU AND YOUR WORLDS HAVE *ONE* CHANCE!

30 MILLION!

THIRTY MILLION! TO BE DELIVERED TO THE STAR SLAMMERS *IMMEDIATELY!*

BUT THAT'S THE PRICE OF A PLANET!

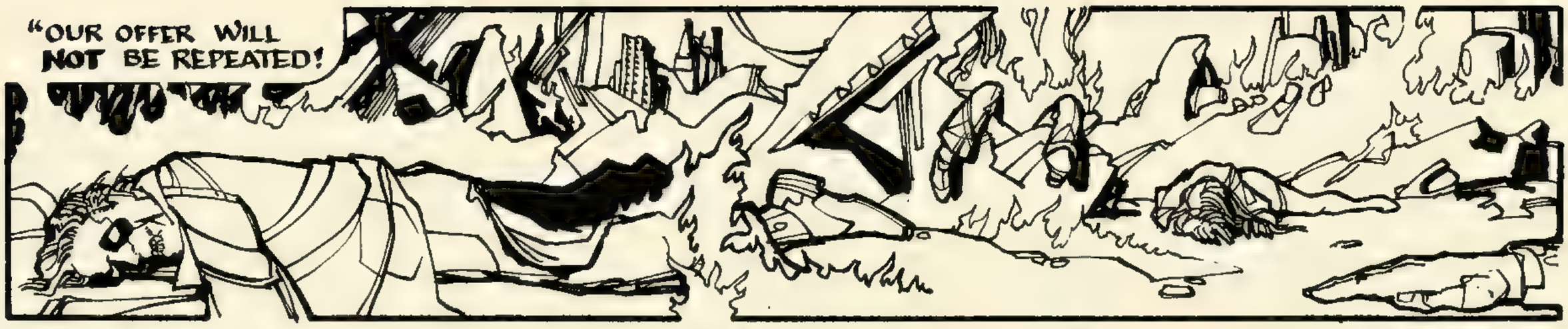
YES, IT IS! WATCH THE MONITOR!

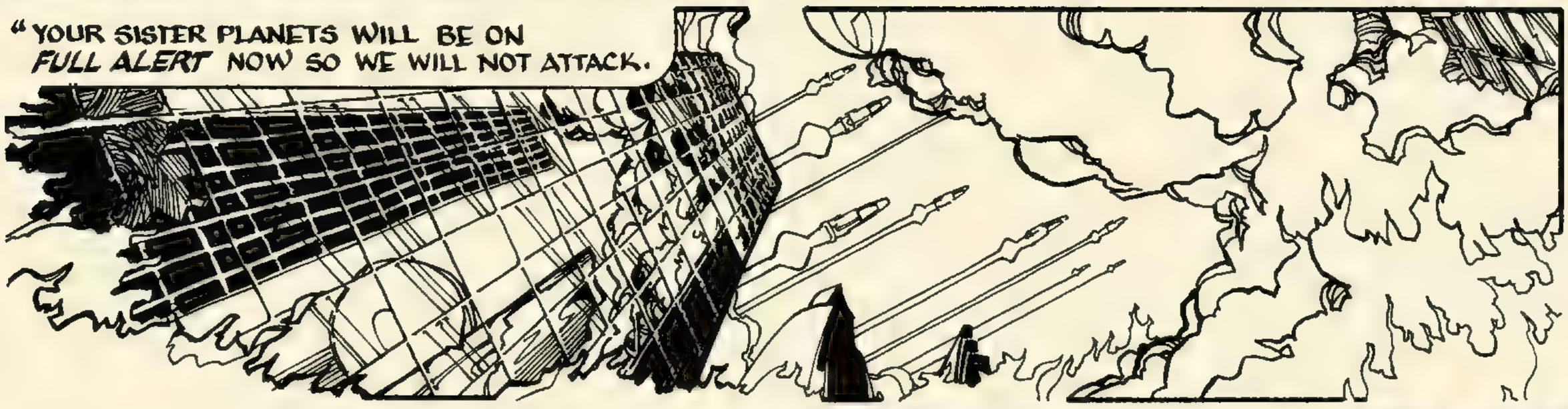
AND ON THE MONITOR SCREEN, THE COUNCIL SEES...
"OVERGAARD FOUR- ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT AND POWERFUL MEMBERS OF THE NETHERWORLDS!

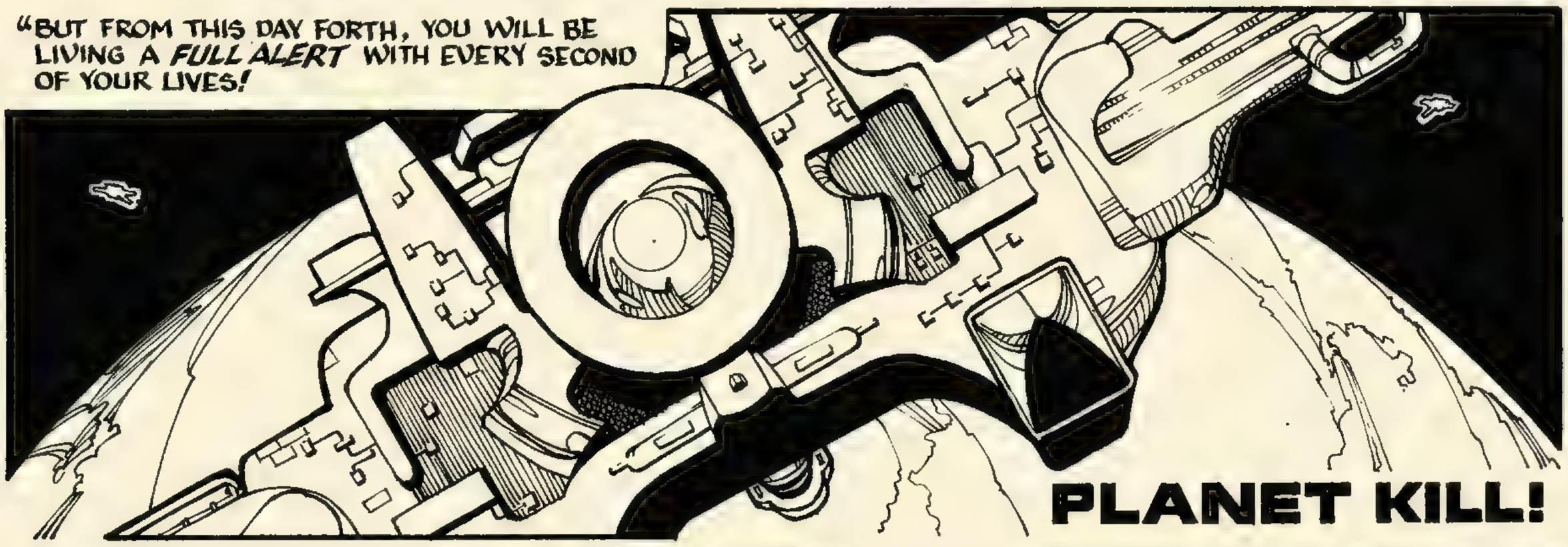
"THIS, COUNSELORS, IS **RUTHLESSNESS!**

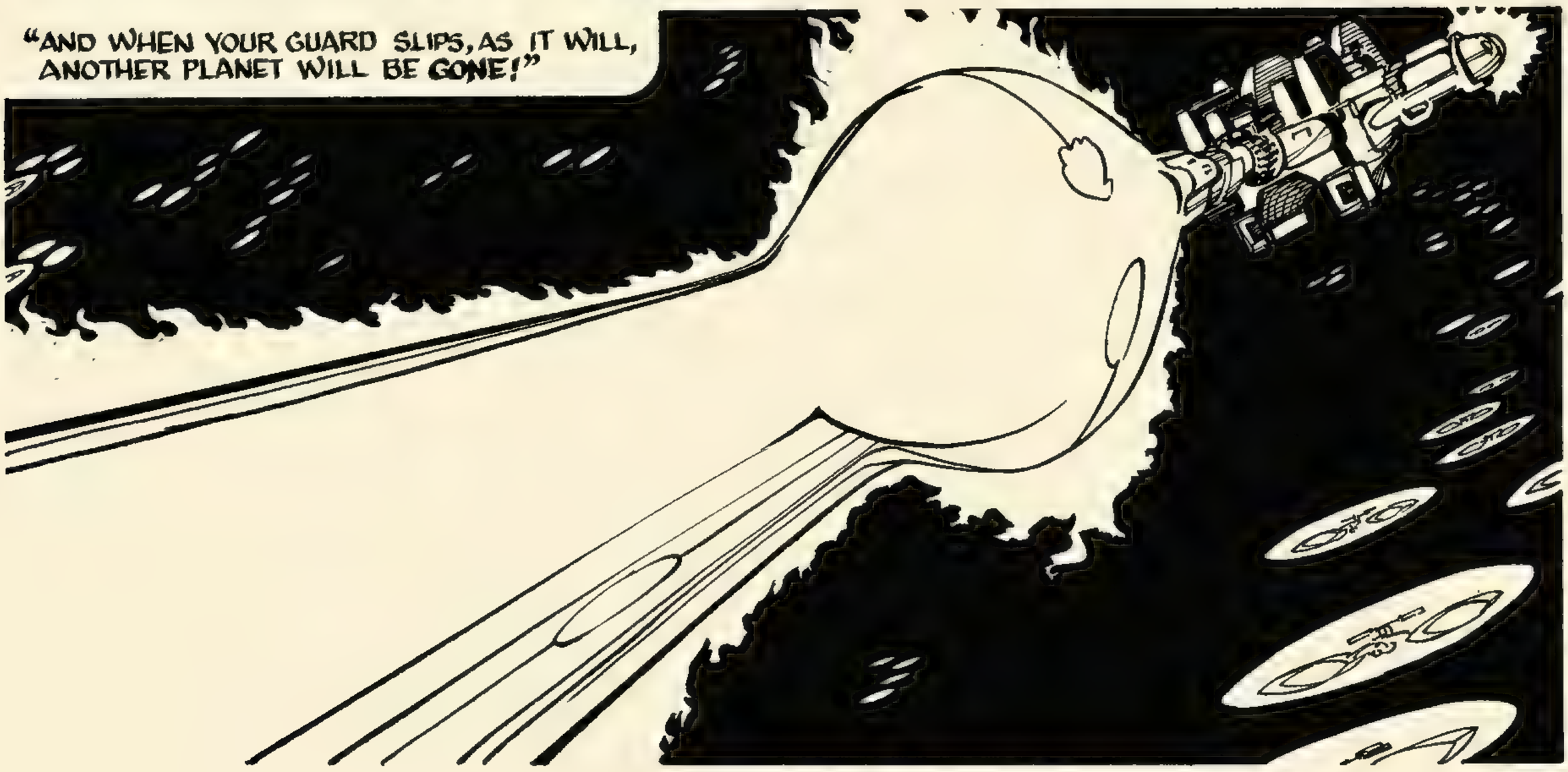
"THE FACES OF THE DYING, WITHOUT HOPE, WITHOUT GUILT,

"FASHIONED FROM THE SEEDS OF **YOUR** TREACHERY.


"OUR OFFER WILL NOT BE REPEATED!


"YOUR SISTER PLANETS WILL BE ON FULL ALERT NOW SO WE WILL NOT ATTACK.


"BUT FROM THIS DAY FORTH, YOU WILL BE LIVING A FULL ALERT WITH EVERY SECOND OF YOUR LIVES!
PLANET KILL!


"AND WHEN YOUR GUARD SLIPS, AS IT WILL, ANOTHER PLANET WILL BE GONE!"

YOU WILL NOT FIND US BUT WE WILL DESTROY YOU... UTTERLY!

YOUR DECISION, COUNSELORS!

...YOU WIN. YOU SHALL HAVE THIS *BLOOD* MONEY!

30 MILLION

EXCELLENT. WE'LL MAKE IT EASY FOR YOU ~ A REGISTERED CREDIT TRANSFER THRU CENTRAL CLEARING!

THERE. SEALED AND VERIFIED.

30 MILLION CREDIT TRANSF

ONE LAST CONDITION, COUNSELORS. MR. FARRAGUT'S **LIFE!**... AS A DETERRENT TO FUTURE STATESMEN OF BAD FAITH!

BURN HIM! NOW!

AAAAAAAAGGGG!

GOODBY, COUNSELORS!
COUNSELORS!
COUNSELORS!
COUNSELORS!
COUNS-
COUNSEL
COUNSELORS!

And into the starfall field of the night walk the Star Slammers, leaving behind the planet dust to swirl in the whispers of their passing.

The End

5-12

STAR SLAMMERS

A selection of art by Walter Simonson

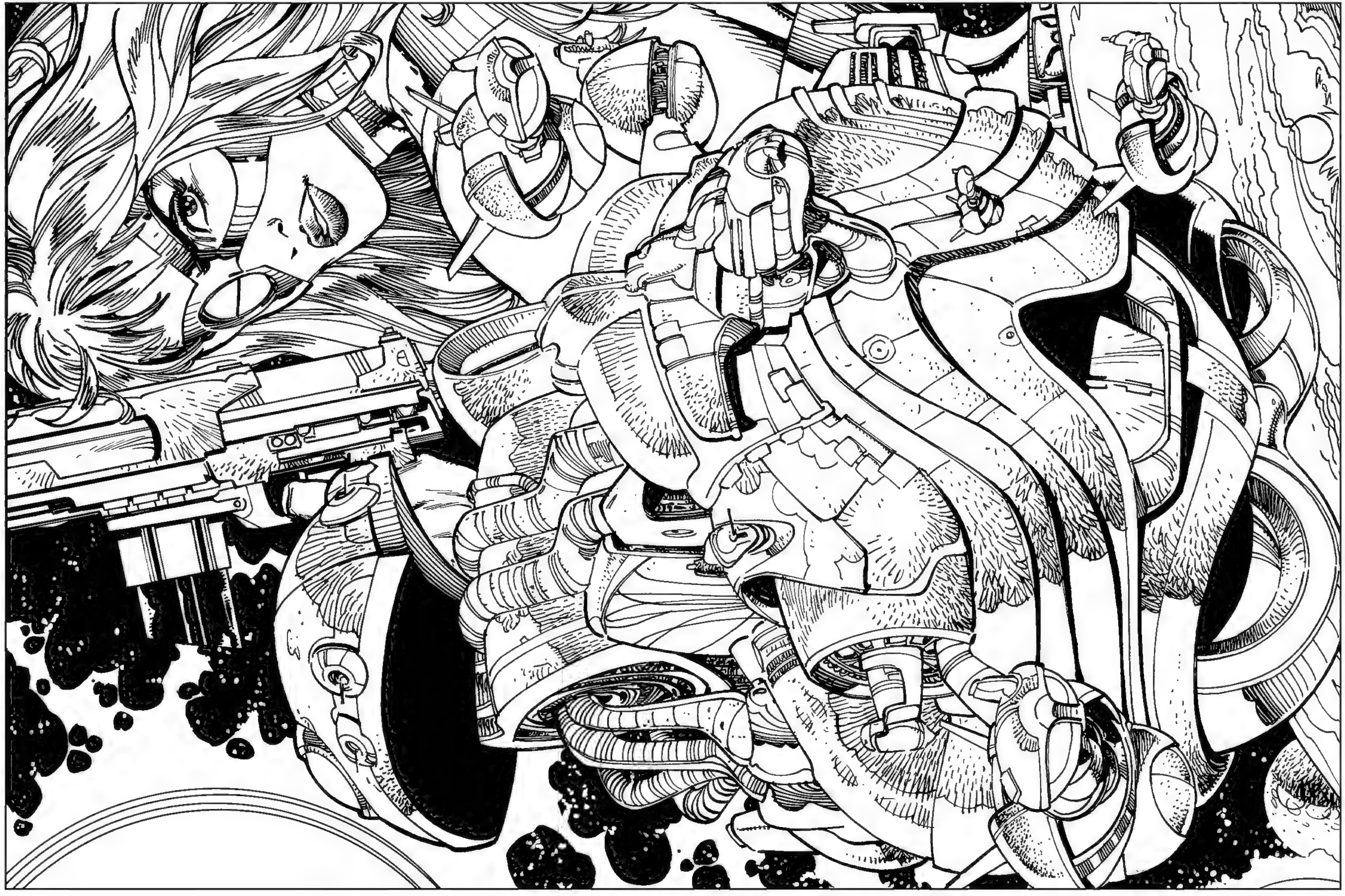
An early Slammers promotional drawing done for Malibu Comics.

The same drawing, colored (from a guide by Richard Ory).

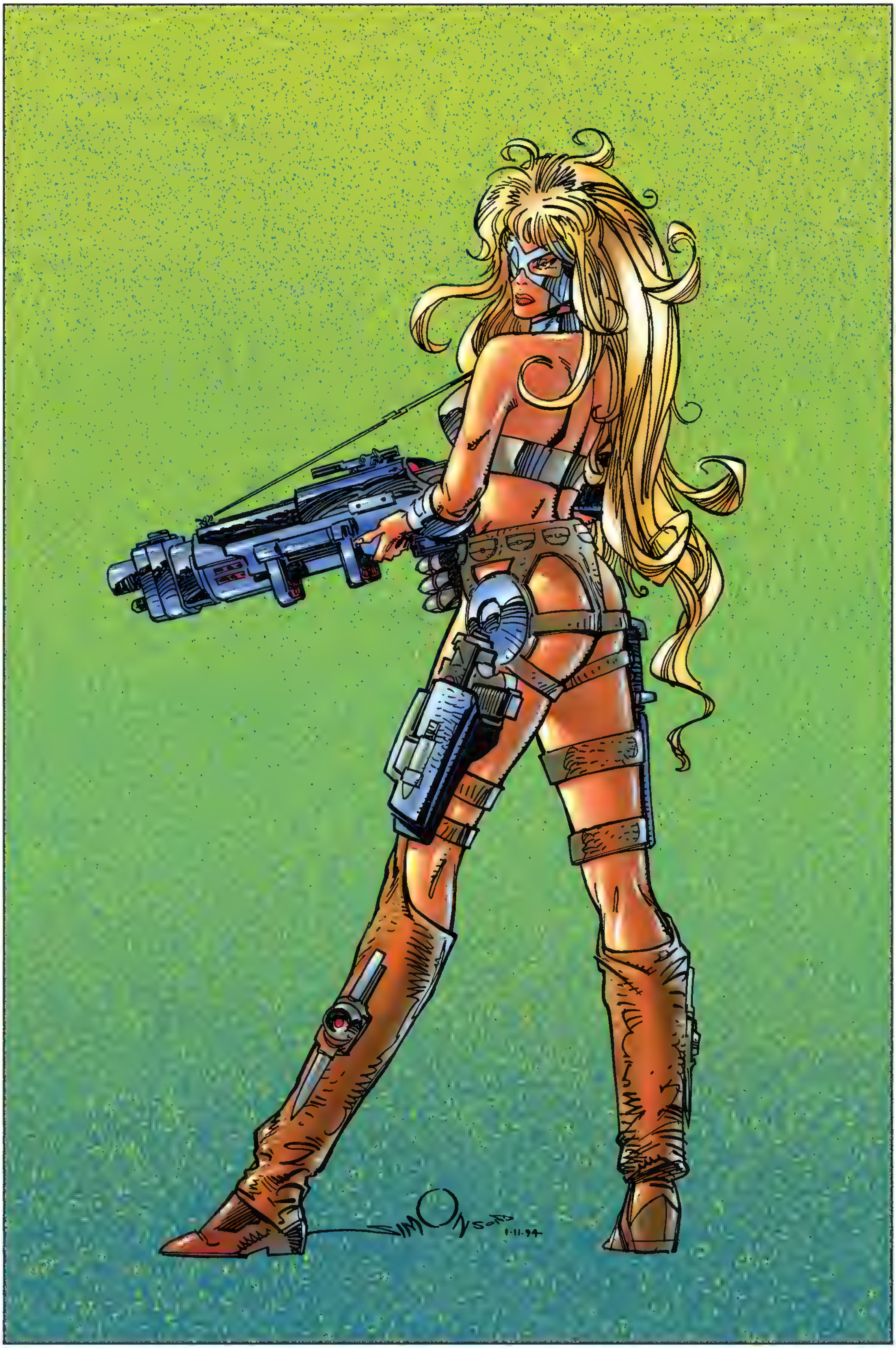
Rojas trading card done for the Creator's Universe set.
Colors by Jon J Muth.

Phaedra trading card done for the Creator's Universe set.
Colors by Walter Simonson.

Promotional drawings of Rojas and Phaedra (opposite) for the Malibu series.



Slammers cover for CARDS ILLUSTRATED, No. 8.



Phaedra trading card for CARDS ILLUSTRATED, No. 8. Colors by Richard Ory.

Star Slammers #1 cover (IDW).

Star Slammers #2 cover (IDW).

Cover for the Advance Comics catalog, No. 65.

Star Slammers #5 cover (IDW).

Star Slammers #3 cover (IDW).

IDW

Once upon a time, there was a race of men who could outshoot, outfight, and outkill anybody. They were paid fabulous sums to act as mercenaries. The practice became so lucrative, they decided to go into business. They became the most successful businessmen in history, and they called themselves...

Star Slammers™

First created by Walter Simonson in his college days at the Rhode Island School of Design and later resurrected both as a Marvel Graphic Novel and then as a miniseries for Malibu and Dark Horse Comics, *Star Slammers* has been near to the artist's heart for close to 50 years.

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SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"